National Library of Canada

Acquisitions and Bibliographic Services Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

Bibliothèque nationale du Canada

Direction des acquisitions et des services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1A 0N4

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

NOTICE

The quality of this microform is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Reproduction in full or in part of this microform is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30, and subsequent amendments.

AVIS

La qualité de cette microforme dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

La reproduction, même partielle, de cette microforme est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30, et ses amendements subséquents.

Canada

University of Alberta

William James's Radically Empirical Self

by

Cindy L. Kleinmeyer

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Department of Philosophy

Edmonton, Alberta

Spring 1995

National Library of Canada
Acquisitions and Bibliographic Services Branch
395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

Bibliothèque nationale du Canada
Direction des acquisitions et des services bibliographiques
395, rue Wellington
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1A 0N4

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

THE AUTHOR HAS GRANTED AN IRREVOCABLE NON-EXCLUSIVE LICENCE ALLOWING THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF CANADA TO REPRODUCE, LOAN, DISTRIBUTE OR SELL COPIES OF HIS/HER THESIS BY ANY MEANS AND IN ANY FORM OR FORMAT, MAKING THIS THESIS AVAILABLE TO INTERESTED PERSONS.

L'AUTEUR A ACCORDE UNE LICENCE IRREVOCABLE ET NON EXCLUSIVE PERMETTANT A LA BIBLIOTHEQUE NATIONALE DU CANADA DE REPRODUIRE, PRETER, DISTRIBUER OU VENDRE DES COPIES DE SA THESE DE QUELQUE MANIERE ET SOUS QUELQUE FORME QUE CE SOIT POUR METTRE DES EXEMPLAIRES DE CETTE THESE A LA DISPOSITION DES PERSONNE INTERESSEES.

THE AUTHOR RETAINS OWNERSHIP OF THE COPYRIGHT IN HIS/HER THESIS. NEITHER THE THESIS NOR SUBSTANTIAL EXTRACTS FROM IT MAY BE PRINTED OR OTHERWISE REPRODUCED WITHOUT HIS/HER PERMISSION.

L'AUTEUR CONSERVE LA PROPRIETE DU DROIT D'AUTEUR QUI PROTEGE SA THESE. NI LA THESE NI DES EXTRAITS SUBSTANTIELS DE CELLE-CI NE DOIVENT ETRE IMPRIMES OU AUTREMENT REPRODUITS SANS SON AUTORISATION.

ISBN 0-612-01514-9

Canada

University of Alberta

Library Release Form

Name of Author: Cindy L. Kleinmeyer

Title of Thesis: William James's Radically Empirical Self

Degree: Master of Arts

Year this Degree Granted: 1995

Permission is hereby granted to the University of Alberta to reproduce single copies of this thesis and to lend or sell such copies for private, scholarly or scientific research purposes only.

The author reserves all other publication and other rights in association with the copyright in the thesis, and except as hereinbefore provided, neither the thesis nor any substantial portion thereof may be printed or otherwise reproduced in any material form whatever without the author's prior written permission.

C. K[illegible]

c/o Lise Gagnon
10503-52 St.
Edmonton, AB
T6A 2G7

April 21st, 1995

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *William James's Radically Empirical Self* submitted by Cindy L. Kleinmeyer in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of *Master of Arts*.

Dr. W. E. Cooper

Dr. Bruce Hunter

Dr. Bernard Linsky

Dr. Nora Stovel

April 18th, 1995

Dedication

For my Grandma Gilles Dubuc who showed me how to live. May your spirit live within me forever. I love you dearly.

Abstract

Part One: The Characteristics of Self in William James's Psychology.

In Part one, I introduce William James's life emphasizing his breadth in both psychology and philosophy. By expanding on his theory of self, I argue that James surpasses Hume's view of self because of the designated role of the passing, judging thought.

Part Two: The Constituents of Consciousness and the Metaphysics of Self.

In Part Two, I argue that James provides the missing medium of consciousness with his concepts of the passing judging thought, and with his ground–breaking concept of radical empiricism that states that the relations among all things are as real as the things themselves, which in turn provide unity and continuity in consciousness, the self, and the universe as a whole.

Part Three: James's Door to Immortality.

In Part Three, I explore James's testimonies to the fruits of religious, and spiritual experiences that he claims open us up to the possibility of spiritual immortality.

Philosophical and Personal

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following Professors for their unique contributions to my graduate years: My advisor, Wes Cooper, for his thoughtful, encouraging advice and teaching throughout my master's degree; Bruce Hunter, for hundreds of fascinating lectures, sound advice, and numerous out of class discussions; Nora Stovel, for years of ballet classes that helped put my mind at rest, and my body to work; Bernie Linsky, for helping me develop the final drafts of my thesis, and Margaret Van de Pitte and Rene Siemens, for encouraging me to pursue an M.A. in philosophy.

I thank my Mom for continuously supporting me in all areas of my life, especially throughout my university years that have been both incredibly exciting and, at times terribly confusing, who provided a lively home life that encouraged me to take an interest in the world. I'll never forget your courage and strength. I also want to thank my Dad for helping me develop the strength I'll need to live a prosperous life. Rob and Randy, I admire you both. Thanks for helping me become who I am today. Lana, thanks for being a great little sister, and for keeping me hip to new music. My aunts Terri and Penny–thanks to you both for spending so much precious time with me. You have provided my life with more stability and kindness than you know. My uncle Jean Marc–I am eternally grateful to you for starting me on the academic road, and for seeing me through many difficult times in philosophy and elsewhere. And Sean, my love. You fill my life with the most intense happiness and hope. I can't thank you enough for coming into my life.
I love you all very much.

My friends, Jeannie, Joan, Pam, Lisa M, Mark L., Dave L., Brendan, Matthew, Sandy, Steven, and all of my good friends in Balada: Ann, Karen, Gary, Kelly, Lianna, Kristine, Kim, Virginia, Mike, and Jim. A special thanks to Jeff for editing my thesis, but mostly for being a great friend. You've all helped make these years my best to date.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1:

William James: Characteristics of Self pp. 1.

Chapter 2:

The Constituents of Consciousness and the Metaphysics of Self pp. 22.

Chapter 3:

James's Door to Immortality pp. 39.

Works Cited

Part One

The Characteristics of Self in William James's Psychology

It seems natural to think of our body as only part of what we call 'the self'. Most people today and throughout history have acknowledged and celebrated some sort of spirituality. The body, then, is most often thought to be accompanied by a soul, mind or spirit. Philosophers, among others, have always argued about what constitutes a self or person, casting the self in a variety of roles from a spiritual being that is trapped within the physical body to a purely physical being that is capable of partaking in the spiritual realm, to a being that has incommensurable physical and spiritual parts. In many philosophical theories of the self, because the task of self–description poses so many difficulties, one often finds struggle and at times, a quiet abandonment of the subject altogether. William James, a twentieth–century American pragmatist, because of the self's evasive nature, considered writing about the self and identity one of the most demanding philosophical challenges of his career. James did, however, manage to write about the self from psychological, philosophical, and religious perspectives, offering a unique approach that captures nuances often overlooked by other philosophers. By analyzing the self in the same way as a skilful artist studies the human figure, James is able to capture complexities and subtleties of the human subject that may have otherwise gone unnoticed. Since James was a painter as well as a philosopher, his artistic sensibilities enabled him to look at the human subject and articulate its most elusive characteristics. A heightened aesthetic sensibility complemented by a keen intellect allowed James to develop a unique and captivating view of the self. Before walking through James's theory of self, I want to focus briefly on his achievements in order to emphasize his admirable breadth on topics in both psychology and philosophy.

In the late nineteenth–century James enjoyed a very broad readership, and today he continues to capture the imaginations of many people, both academic and non–academic alike. It is easy to understand why James's academic peers were interested in his work, since James so often exchanged philosophically challenging letters with his colleagues, and perhaps more obviously, because of his energetic contributions to the psychological and philosophical breakthroughs of his day. But why someone from the general public would become fascinated by James is another issue. Gerald Myers offers James's "vibrant literary style" as one reason for James's ability to "communicate with the intellectually curious from every background." Perhaps another reason why James's work spans such a wide readership is because of its pragmatic philosophical temperament, in which he argues that the theoretical and practical aspects of human experiences are "inevitably intertwined." (G.E. Myers 1). For James, the world was most adequately described when theory and practice were meshed and subsequently used to

interpret and understand our continuously changing intellectual landscape. James was truly a gifted literary genius. He wrote elegantly, and never without passion and vigour. So perhaps James's literary dynamism is partly responsible for his popularity, but I think that it must also be due to his profound philosophical and religious insights that strike a chord for so many readers. With over seventy publications, James tackled numerous psychological and philosophical subjects. In his scholarly wake, James left behind rich theories and many intriguing insights with which to interpret our contemporary, multi–disciplinary world of ideas.

James's scholarly career began in his early twenties and persisted throughout his life until his death at sixty–eight years of age. In the 1870's James's Harvard medical degree eventually secured him a lecturing position in anatomy and physiology at Harvard University. From very early on in his life, scholarly and creative pursuits were his great interests. James spent much of his youth travelling abroad with his father, Henry James, Sr., becoming fluent in French and German, and meeting a number of influential nineteenth–century thinkers. At nineteen, James's interest in painting took him to New Port where he studied and painted for about one year. James, however, decided to put aside his interests in painting for an academic life that would engage him until his death.

After he married Alice Howe Gibbins in 1878, settled in Boston, and began teaching at Harvard, James accepted a contract to write *The Principles of Psychology:* a book that was to be finished in two years, but which instead became an intense labour of twelve. Since James had been keenly interested in psychology and physiology during his Harvard years, his published essays of this time formed much of what he eventually published as the *Principles.* In this highly esteemed book, James writes on the mind/body relationship, thought and the consciousness of self, time, memory, space, reality and free will, not to mention numerous other important psychological and philosophical concepts. James also specifically responded to his colleagues and predecessors, either praising or rejecting their theories, but never failing to express clearly and even simply what other philosophers had often explained using thick philosophical jargon or convoluted arguments. James's candid critiques are able to cut straight to the quick, leaving bare an author's central thesis.[1] James continued writing, lecturing and publishing on topics in psychology and philosophy up until his death.

---

[1]When writing about the Atomists and their thoughts on the consciousness of self, James clearly displays this candid flair. He writes, "Hume is at bottom as much of a metaphysician as Thomas Aquinas. No wonder he can discover no 'hypothesis.' The unity of the parts of the stream is just as real as a connection as their diversity is a real separation; both connection and separation are ways in which the past thoughts appear to the present Thought;—unlike each other in respect of date and certain qualities—this is the separation; alike in other qualities, and continuous in time—this is the connection. In demanding a more real connection than this obvious and verifiable likeness and continuity, Hume seeks 'the world behind the looking-glass,' and gives a striking example of that Absolutism which is the great disease of philosophic Thought." William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 334.

In August of 1910 James died in his summer home in Chocoma, New Hampshire, leaving behind a brilliant scholarly legacy. Colleagues and friends, such as John Dewy, praised James's life and academic achievements saying that:

> By common consent he was far and away the greatest of American psychologists—it was a case of James first and no second. Were it not for the unreasoned admiration of men and things German, there would be no question, I think, that he was the greatest psychologist of his time in any country—perhaps of any time (G.E. Myers 1).

Russell described James's death as "a personal loss by all who knew him" crediting him as being "one of the most eminent, and probably the most widely known, of contemporary philosophers" (G.E. Myers 1). James's intellectual breadth accounts for his many scholarly publications in psychology, philosophy, religion, psychical research and self–help theories and methods.

A sketch of James's biography shows that his interests were vast, spanning the fine arts, liberal arts and natural sciences. But, as I will show in the latter part of my thesis, in Part Three, James's interests in the unexplained, mysterious workings of the mind and spirit eventually led him to study the various religious attitudes of extraordinary people, carrying him far afield of his scientific starting point. James moves comfortably from the natural sciences to religion because of his pragmatic intellectual disposition. Since James argues as a pragmatist that we ought to ask what practical difference it will make for people's lives if we accept one theory over another, it makes sense for James to take an interest in a variety of human experiences from as many disciplines as possible in order to best understand human nature.

Initially, then, I want to show that James's conception of self and personal identity can offer solutions to some of the limitations found within David Hume's empiricism, which I will explain later on in Part One. James fleshes out a 'middle ground view' in *The Principles of Psychology*, which offers an alternative view of self and personal identity that I will argue surpasses the traditional empiricist position of Hume. When we consider Hume's thoughts on personal identity, compared with those of James, we find substantial evidence showing that James's theory solves many of the unsolved or negatively solved problems of Hume. I want to show that many of Hume's problems stem from his narrow epistemic criterion, i.e., that ideas must be reducible to single impressions. The problems I will address include Hume's criterion problem, his inadequate characterization of the self as a mere "bundle of impressions," and his problem of locating the who or what that is doing the psychological associating. I will then argue that James's theory of the stream of consciousness unified by the passing, judging thought, may help bridge the gap between the Cartesian immutable–self–through–

time position, and the Humean bundle–of –impressions–in–flux view of personal identity.[2] James's theory of a unified consciousness is fully developed in his radical empiricism in which James emphasizes that there are real connections between objects or things that we perceive. This sets James up for a sophisticated metaphysics of self that carries him far beyond his work as a psychologist.

In the early twentieth century, intellectuals, including James, did not impose a sharp division between psychology and philosophy, which allowed James to speak about the self and personal identity from both vantage points, affording his investigations on human nature an unusual depth and breadth of analysis. James thought that the concept of self was perhaps the most difficult to articulate and that when speaking of self we quickly run short of words and run straight into metaphysics and ultimately mystical testimony. But James nevertheless persisted in his inquiries about the self, exploring the vast range of characteristics that can be ascribed to a person including physical, social and spiritual dimensions. When James attempts to answer the question 'what constitutes a self or person?', he begins by defining what we call the 'self' or 'me' in its "widest acceptation," following it to its "most delicate and subtle form, advancing from the study of the empirical... to that of the pure ego." (*Principles* 279). Recent work in identity theory, such as Robert Nozick's, takes a similar approach to James. Nozick uses theory from both psychology and philosophy to create a comprehensive analysis of self.[3] James is, however, working on the identity project mostly as a psychologist, analyzing data in order to predict and control. As a philosopher, James seeks the pragmatic or cash value of the first–person pronoun, i.e, the words 'I' or 'me' in anything that refers to one's self or person. James claims that the conception of what we call 'me' is often difficult to distinguish from what we call 'mine'. For James, the clearest way to answer the question about 'me' and 'mine' is to describe the physical body as "a fluctuating material," because, as James points out, the body is often described as part of the concepts 'me', or 'mine', whereas at times the body is described as a mere prison of clay from which the true self awaits its liberty. For James, 'me' and 'I' need to be distinguished from one another because their referents denote different aspects of the self. 'Me,' for instance, claims the body or the physical self, whereas 'I' refers to the metaphysical element described as the passing, judging thought, i.e., thoughts that continuously flow in the stream of consciousness.

In *Principles* James writes "that in its widest possible sense... a man's self is the sum total of all that he can call his, not only his body and his

---

2Although James in my view offers more comprehensive and descriptively accurate views of the self and personal identity than Hume, I should mention that James credits Hume and other empiricists with putting the concepts of self and personal identity on an empirical footing. James argues, however, that in many respects Hume's conception is inaccurate because he interprets consciousness atomistically, and thus misinterprets the essential nature of the self.

3Nozick's 'Closest Continuer Theory' is what I have in mind, which will be discussed later on in Part One.

psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his land and horses, and yacht and bank account." James's broad view of the self again finds company with contemporary theory. Nozick, in *Philosophical Explanations*, argues that our identities are malleable enough so as to include a variety of different entities in our self–conceptions. These entities are simply any past, present or future dimensions that the self ascribes to itself, including, as James suggests, a person's possessions, beliefs, etc. For both James and Nozick then, my present possessions, such as my house and land, my past memories of happiness in childhood, and my hope to one day transcend this world to a spiritual realm, all constitute what I think of as my self.[4] Implicitly, then, James is working out his theory of the self pragmatically, continually drawing upon the explanatory power that grows out of his developing theories, the origins of which he partially credits to the work of his contemporaries, such as Charles Renouvier and Josiah Royce.[5] By painting his conception of self on the broadest available canvas, James is allowing for a rich and malleable portrait of its constituents based on the ever–changing media of human experience. James begins this multi–textured analysis by dividing the self into its material, social, and spiritual components.

Deeply rooted within our sense of bodily self is an attachment to material goods, such as gold, or our homes, and a warm sentiment to familial ties. So our closest family members and our dearest friends, in James's mind, are wrapped up tightly with our identity (*Principles* 280–281). Any violation inflicted on a loved one, or taken against one's belongings, is a violation to one's self. Therefore, stripping away my material possessions, or family ties, is in some sense infringing on my identity.

Some form of public recognition also helps to inform our sense of social identity, and favourable, public recognition is what we most desire from family and friends. Recognition established in casual acknowledgement and friendships is so important that without it a person feels as though she has suffered one of the greatest social injustices. James argues that if it were possible for a person not to receive any public recognition whatsoever, then this sort of treatment would be more brutal than the cruellest physical torture (*Principles* 282). A person without any recognition whatsoever cannot be called a social being. Outside recognition from an observer is then needed to set up a social context, between what James calls the knower and known, or the observer and observed. This implies that the observer is aware of being observed or recognized, otherwise she would be left unaware and in the

---

4But when speaking about past and future dimensions, we are restricted to memories and beliefs, hopes or expectations, since physical objects can only be part of a person's present dimensions.

5In Gerald Myers' *William James: His Life and Thought*, Myers mentions that James didn't formally announce that pragmatism would be the name of his philosophical method until 1898 when he wrote and presented a lecture at the University of California at Berkeley. It is obvious, however, in James's earlier writings that the pragmatic method of seeking practical results from his enquiries was well underway in his *Principles of Psychology*, which was published in 1890, but started about twelve years prior in 1878. pp. xvii and 346.

darkness of her own material sense of self. James speaks about our most intimate social relationships as the most peculiar type of social self.

James writes, "the most peculiar social self which one is apt to have is in the mind of the person one is in love with. The good or bad fortunes of this self cause the most intense elation or dejection... . To his own consciousness, he *is* not, so long as this particular social self fails to get recognition, and when it is recognized his contentment passes all bounds" (*Principles* 282). James's sentiments about the 'lover' whose identity becomes an integral part of another person's being, are echoed in the contemporary thought of Nozick in his book titled *The Examined Life*. In chapter eight, Nozick discusses the identity that evolves between two people in an intimate relationship. The identity lovers achieve is 'shared,' manifested in the form of a 'we'. This newly formed 'we,' a shared identity among lovers, is a private as well as a public bond. The identity a couple shares, when made public, is an additional reinforcement that they are indeed a couple, a 'we'. The public's acknowledgement of a couple's relationship verifies their shared identity, and enables them to claim that they are together, and proud. Nozick thinks that the shared identity of a 'we' is all–consuming. He claims that "each person in a romantic *we* wants to possess the other completely; yet each also needs the other to be a non–subservient person" (Nozick, *Examined Life* 74). The formation of a we is more than a way of thinking about oneself and another person. For Nozick, it is a change of identity. Roughly speaking, on Nozick's Closest Continuer Theory, in the formation of a we, a person begins to understand herself in terms of another person's shared dimensions of character and situation. We are, in Nozick's terms, giving greater weight to another person's dimensions, identifying with them as closest to one's own sense of self. (Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* 105) Nozick's thinking is close to James on this point, but James takes a more psychological angle in his analysis of the many selves that constitute one human being.

The identity of a social self that is inextricably tied up with reactions from peers or other associates can split, says James, depending on its official role in any given situation. James cites the example of a man who makes decisions in the dual role of an ordinary citizen, and as a judge. In his private life he feels pity for a man accused of murder, but as a judge he feels no pity, only a responsibility to punish according to the law. This sort of split amongst our different social selves is commonplace in James's experience. What it points to for James is a complexity of the human psyche. The self is best described, then, as a person who is comprised of a web of overlapping selves; the varied and numerous influences from other people in our social networks, in addition to all of the sensual stimuli in our environments, including visual images, and musical sounds, all contribute to what we commonly refer to as our 'self'. Other than providing an interesting and rich portrait of the self, I think that here, James implicitly addresses one of his more general concepts that may be termed 'unity in diversity', in an attempt

to hold on to the notion of a unified self. James speaks to this concept by arguing that the self is many selves in one, and he attempts to do the same with his conception of consciousness (that I develop in Part Two), by arguing that consciousness is multi–layered and yet unified. The spiritual part of the self rounds out the material and social aspects of the self, but, as James attests, it is perhaps the most difficult to articulate.

James admits that the central nucleus of the spiritual self is bound to be construed in many forms, from the concept of a substantial or transcendental soul to the imaginary being denoted by the pronoun 'I'. As an empiricist, however, James suggests that at the very least we need to be clear about how this essential and central part of the spiritual self *feels*. James writes, "*Now*, let us try to settle for ourselves as definitely as we can, just how this central nucleus of the Self may *feel*, no matter whether it be a spiritual substance or only a delusive word" (*Principles* 286). For James, a person's spiritual self, the inner or subjective being, is comprised of a person's "psychic faculties or dispositions," plus discriminating and argumentative faculties (*Principles* 283). Our moral sensibilities, our conscience, and our will are also essential components of the spiritual self. The spiritual element of our consciousness is characterized by James abstractly in these categories of spiritual reflection. And the spiritual self can also be understood concretely, he says, as either the "entire stream of our personal consciousness, or the present 'segment' or 'section' of that stream" (James, *Principles* 284). In either case, an inward–looking view, a reflective process, is needed for a description of the spiritual self in order to think ourselves as thinkers. James thinks that this means that at a very early age we come to distinguish between thought, as such, and what thought is about. This is supposed to reveal the capacity for reflective thought in human beings, the kind of thought that begins to open us up to the mysteries of our spiritual consciousness (James, *Principles* 282). Here we are at a turning point in self–description and understanding. We no longer see ourselves as simply outwardly facing beings, focusing on the objects of our attentions. Instead, we have taken an inward turn towards our subjective spiritual consciousness, focusing on the spiritual aspects of ourselves as *thought* itself. Nozick is close to James's thinking on this subjective inner turn. We have the capacity to "reflexively self–refer," says Nozick (*Examined Life* 107). Our consciousness is reflexive when it knows oneself *as itself* (Nozick, *Examined Life* 144). We have a reflexive conscious knowledge of, and relationship to, the self when we refer to ourselves with 'I', 'me' or 'my' (Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* 71).

The identification of the spiritual self as thought itself instead of the objects thought about is described by James as a "momentous" and "mysterious" human operation (*Principles* 284). When James speaks of our conscious mental life as our spiritual centre, he speaks in terms of owning and disowning, which naturally assumes an owner. Nozick sheds some light on the point about ownership. He claims that quite mysteriously we move

from being aware of ourselves and thoughts to thinking that we own or possess our thoughts. What Nozick concludes from this is that "the self is born, then, in an act of appropriation and acquisition" (*Examined Life* 145). However feasible Nozick's claims may be, he is clearly writing in the spirit of James. The owner, for James, is the spiritual self, construed as a particular element of the stream of consciousness singled out because of its intimate relationship with the larger, unified self. "It is the home of interest," says James, "not the pleasant or the painful, not even pleasure or pain, as such, but that within us to which pleasure and pain, the pleasant and the painful, speak. It is the source of effort and attention, and the place from which appear to emanate the fiats of the will" (*Principles* 285). The self of selves then, for James, is thus far a reflective spiritual consciousness that actively pursues its own course. James's rich conception of self was born out of the empiricist tradition, and his thoughts on the self are largely influenced by the philosophy of David Hume. But, as James argues, Hume's empirical theory of the self fails to go far enough. After reviewing Hume's theory of the self, I will show further why I think that by contrast, James's theory is more comprehensive and more descriptively accurate.

In his *Treatise on Human Nature,* Hume, when writing about personal identity, remarks that "There are some philosophers, who imagine we are at every moment intimately conscious of what we call our SELF; that we feel its... continuance in existence; and are certain... both of its perfect identity and simplicity" (251) Regretfully, Hume says, not a word of this description of the self is true. Here we assume that Hume is referring to Descartes' theory of the self in order to distance himself from the rationalist's view of personal identity. Descartes, in hoping to establish a non–physical, immutable portrait of the self that is able to persist through time is, according to Hume, offering a misguided conception of the self. In characterizing the self as something that stays the same despite all imaginable physical changes, Descartes is forced to posit an immaterial soul substance, something that withstands superficial and even deep physical change over any amount of time in one's life. It seems clear why Descartes offers this position. Surely, we would admit that an accurate and satisfying conception of the self needs to be one that lasts through physical changes. If I undergo heart transplant surgery tomorrow, a week from now I want to be confident that my self is the same as the self of a week prior, even though one of my most fundamental organs has been replaced by another that is stronger and well functioning. So, over the course of any physical transformations that a person's body endures throughout life, one hopes that the essential self will persist so that a sound identity is obtainable. The attraction here may be due to a psychological security that is inspired by this description of the self. Within this description, we may be confident that there is something secure and enduring about ourselves that cannot be stripped away by the ravages of physical deformity, emotional trauma, or old age. The comforting (or sometimes not so comforting, but instead the insufferable) stable self, would then remain behind in the wake of

life's tumultuous throes. But an understanding of the attractive features of the rationalist definition of the self would not be enough to quell the sceptical queries of Hume. For Hume, evidence in terms of impressions and ideas is what is required for such a conception. Moreover, Hume's theory suggests that the self is, in fact, not an immutable and non-physical substance persisting through time, but just the opposite. The self, says Hume, is a collection of impressions, persistently fluctuating in appearance and temperament. To Hume's mind, then, there is nothing earthly that is not vulnerable to change, and the self is no exception.

For Hume, a concept of self requires, first, that we are able to have an impression, which is the basis for any subsequent idea of the self. Hume's argument is that, prior to any concept forming, we must have ideas, and the requirement for the formation of an idea comes by way of a single sensory impression in the mind–we must be able to experience a self to be sure of its existence. But the problem for Hume is that we do not have this kind of experience. Hume claims in his *Treatise on Human Nature* that "It must be some one impression that gives rise to every real idea. But self or person is not any one impression, but that to which our several impressions and ideas are suppos'd to have a reference" (Hume,*Treatise* 251) My infinite number of 'self' impressions and 'self' ideas, then, culminate in what I mistakenly call an idea of my self or person. Descartes may have accepted this way of speaking, especially if we were to frame this concept in Cartesian terms: I have a clear and distinct idea of my self every time I think about who is doing the thinking. But Hume objects to this way of speaking and reminds us that it isn't one impression or one idea that constitutes our conception of self. What informs our notion of self is instead, all kinds of impressions, including how we see ourselves in the mirror and how we hear ourselves in conversation with a friend. For Hume, then, choosing one idea that has been informed by a single impression from the daily gamut of impressions is a misguided attempt at characterizing the self. The urge to call a diverse range of ideas about one's self a self, in the singular, does not accord with experience, says Hume, and thus affords us a fictitious view of the self.

But let us assume that we can offer a single impression of the self which gives rise to such an idea. Hume remarks that, if this were possible, a temporal restriction would need to be added. He claims that, with respect to impressions giving rise to ideas of the self, "that impression must continue invariably the same through the whole course of our lives; since self is supposed to exist after that manner" (*Enquiry* 14). This qualification only adds to the difficulty of arriving at a suitable conception of the self. Not only must we offer a single impression which gives rise to our idea of the self, but the impression must now also be invariable, such that it is always what we are referring to by the name of 'me' or 'myself'. It is no surprise, then, that Hume quickly discounts any possibility of offering such an impression when he contends that "there is no impression constant and invariable" (*Enquiry*

14). Strictly speaking, then, in Hume's scheme we cannot make any claims about a single, invariable idea of the self.

Hume claims that we order the flow of events by the psychological association of ideas: this amounts to an explanation for the way in which we identify and order things as the condition for the possibility of making sense of the world. Hume argues that "our notions of personal identity proceed entirely from the smooth and uninterrupted progress of the thought along a train of connected ideas according to the principles above explained" (*Enquiry* 52). Hume is speaking specifically of resemblance and causation. Hume's definition of resemblance is important because, as he writes, it is responsible for ordering the flow of our experiences, distinguishing one thing from the next, whether it be thoughts or objects.[6] The distinct perceptions of our experiences are related in our minds through the resemblance of one thing with another. Hume writes that mistaking sameness for similarity i.e., mistaking {A=B for A is like B} is what we do when we claim that one perception resembles the next. Hume argues that "resemblance is the cause of the confusion and mistake, and makes us substitute the notion of identity, instead of that of related objects" (*Enquiry* 48). This means that, when a series of perceptions is identified as a particular person, for example, what we are allegedly doing is combining the totality of related perceptions, and wrongly identifying them as a person.

Hume argues that this principle of resemblance joins together one thought to that of another, enabling an ordering process of the perceptions in the mind. Psychological association, instead of an actual idea of the self, is what accounts for our ability to identify a number of impressions as a self or person. So Hume is saying that essentially we believe in a fictitious self because our psychologies are hard wired to fool us into overlooking the discontinuity in our perceptions. This point is made clearly by Terence Penelhum. He writes:

> It is essential to recognize that Hume does not think that the associative connections of resemblance and causation constitute real bonds among the perceptions that they connect. They merely provide an explanation of our *overlooking* the numerical distinctness of those perceptions from one another; they do not *remove* this numerical distinctness (Penelhum, *Hume* 79–80).

Penelhum also remarks that, not surprisingly, Hume fails to tell us what such a bond would look like. James and Hume strongly disagree on this issue. James supports the opposite view when he argues that the relations among thoughts (which are synonymous with Hume's impressions) do in fact function as the connections that Hume denies exist. Hume seems to be in the wrong on this issue, since the relations between perceptions or thoughts may

---

6Terence Penelhum writes that when describing "our alleged confusion between identity and diversity, Hume abandons the terminology of perceptions, and talks instead of objects." Terence Penelhum, *Hume*, (London, England: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1975), pp. 81.

function very well as the bond that Hume claims is missing. Penelhum thinks that Hume's "perplexity about personal identity derives in part from a mistaken interpretation of identity in general" (Penelhum, *Hume* 82). He adds that Hume's "fundamental error is his assertion that the idea of identity is the idea of an object that persists without changing" (Penelhum, *Hume* 80). At the heart of Penelhum's criticism is the claim that Hume misunderstands numerical and specific sameness. Penelhum argues that for specific sameness, it is required that an object at time *a* remain unchanged at time *b*. But this is not the case for numerical sameness: an object that is numerically identical through time need not entail specific sameness; i.e., the characteristics of the object need not all be identically the same as it persists through time. Penelhum, quite rightly I think, concludes from this argument that what Hume "should have said is that the relationships we discern between the successive parts of the changing things are the relationships which ground our ascription of identity to the temporally continuous wholes to which they belong–or, in contemporary philosophical parlance, they are the relationships which supply our criteria of identity for continuing objects of those kinds" (*Hume* 81). In short, all that we require for an identity is a recognition that there exist real, bonding relationships amongst the similarities and diversities among our perceptions, thoughts or objects that make up common wholes, whether they be a visual image or our understanding of a self.

Owen Flanagan's summary of the identity issue between the rationalists and the empiricists puts the problem that James is dealing with into clearer focus. In *The Science of the Mind*, Flanagan argues that the Rationalists in the tradition of Descartes, and the Empiricists in the wake of Hume, typically take an all–or–nothing approach in their attempts to formulate a theory of personal identity. Flanagan writes, "Many rationalists follow Descartes and claim that amidst the physical changes to one's body one remains exactly the same person. The irresistible conclusion is that something immutable, and therefore non–physical, must account for our persistent identity over time" (Flanagan,*Science of the Mind* 32). But Hume's standard rebuttal charges that this conception is confused; Hume contends that there is nothing invulnerable to change. Flanagan, remarking on Hume's conviction, says that "many empiricists following Hume, are unable to find any empirical warrant for the belief in a self which has a unified consciousness and integrity and sameness over time" (*Science of the Mind* 32). It appears that we are left with two options from the empiricist and rationalist views of the self, neither of which are palatable. We either submit to the rationalists and agree that there is something ineffable, intangible and immutable through time that we call the self, or condone the empiricist line that eliminates the common sense view of the self. It is more compelling, however, to adopt James's view of the self because he confirms our deep–seated conviction that our belief in a self is more than a mere psychological fiction.

James reminds us that, ever since the time of Hume, it has been difficult for psychology to provide a satisfactory account of personal identity without embracing spiritualism and the idea of a substantial soul or a transcendental principle of unity, or without consenting to the Humean denial of the existence of a personal identity beyond a stream of unconnected passing thoughts or impressions (*Principles* 214). James offers what I call a 'middle ground view' between these two extremes, reconciling the seemingly polar positions of empiricism and spiritualism such that the spiritual and physical aspects of personal identity are accounted for within a whole or unified conscious self.

As we have seen, Hume argues that, in order to have an idea of a self, we would have to provide an invariable impression of 'self', and since this is not possible, the idea of 'self' in this sense is unattainable. What Hume leaves us with is a self that is comprised of passing impressions. James and Hume both recognize the difficulty of providing clear evidence of the same self over time, and that continuity and resemblance are for the most part responsible for the idea that the self is the same today as it was yesterday. But James seems to clear up this problem left unsolved by Hume. For Hume, it is a problem that we cannot offer evidence of a single, invariable impression of the self today as that same self as we have encountered in the past (even if an impression could be found). What James does is ask what it means to say "I am the same self I was yesterday," and answers by introducing our thought processes as the key to solving this so–called identity through time problem. James claims that the answer lies in our own thoughts possessing a sense of "warmth and intimacy" (*Principles* 316). All of our "selves" at any given moment feel this warmth about our own thoughts and feelings, so much so that these feelings cling to the self and give us a sense of personal identity. I have a distinct sense of who I am and who I am not, just as I know what is mine and what is not.

James attempts to dissolve Hume's mystery of personal identity by formulating a conception of thought as unified and yet diverse so that we can arguably maintain our identity through time. James explains the issue of sameness and the implications this has for personal identity:

> The sense of our own personal identity, then, is exactly like any one of our other perceptions of sameness among phenomena. It is a conclusion grounded either on the resemblance in a fundamental respect, or on the continuity before the mind, of the phenomena compared (James,*Principles* 316).

I take the force of James's thoughts on this matter to be this: why should personal identity pose any special problems to our understanding when it is like any other phenomena? And I assume this is why James says that "it (personal identity) must not be taken to mean more than these grounds warrant, or treated as a sort of metaphysical or absolute unity" (*Principles* 316). James's analysis provides evidence for a personal identity that we hold

over time and that is connected through resemblance and continuity grounded in our biological features. Our ability to think about our past with a sense of warmth and intimacy provides us with a personal identity composed of a multi–faceted self. James sums it up this way: *"Resemblance among the parts of a continuum of feelings* (especially bodily feelings) experienced along with things widely different in all other regards, *thus constitutes the real and verifiable 'personal identity' which we feel."* (James, *Principles* 319). But this is only part of the more sophisticated account that James eventually adopts. Thus far, James has explored the empirical aspects of identity, and next, he explores a theory of 'The Unity of Consciousness' which serves as the further level of analysis of personal identity. James's empirical aspect of identity coupled with his theory of the consciousness of thought makes for a more coherent and deeper description of personal identity than what his empiricist predecessors were able to offer. For James, leaving this analysis at the empirical level would be to miss essential explanatory points. The depths of Hume's analysis ends here, but James's continues in his theory of unified consciousness.

James's many selves unify in a self or a person because consciousness dictates such unity. The analogy that James uses to explain this concept involves a cow owner, branding his herd of cows. The owner in this analogy represents any section of consciousness or pulse of thought. James calls this the "vehicle of the judgement of identity," or, less formally, the glue in consciousness that maintains a smooth flowing thought process. The branding represents the warmth and continuity that our personal thoughts emit, and the beasts themselves are a metaphor for individual thoughts. The personal aspect of consciousness in the cow herder analogy is represented by what James calls a self–brand, just as the herder has a herd–brand. In James's view, our thoughts are our own because of their warmth and intimacy, they are branded because they are ours and not ours because we brand them as our own (*Principles* 320). The cow herder in this analogy, recognizing his cows for branding, represents the section of consciousness that allows for our sense of personal identity. Recognizing our own thoughts of the present and past helps us form an identity with our present and past selves.

Our thoughts, then, flow in a unified or continuous manner, but they cling to our personal consciousness not just because of the herdsman concept, i.e., not just because they are ours. James claims that the sticking together of thoughts involves more than the associationists admit in their analysis, arguing that it "involves a real belonging to a real owner, to a pure spiritual entity of some kind. Relation to this entity is what makes the self's constituents stick together as they do for thought" (James, *Principles* 320). So here James provides the missing 'medium' of the associationist account of ideas of Hume. The linking together of ideas needs a medium for experience to hang together, just as the various selves of our thoughts about personal identity need a medium in which to unite, thereby rooting our personal

experiences in a common soil. Our thoughts, says James, do not just resemble past thoughts in a continuous manner; this account remains insufficient. Thoughts are held together because they have unity with a former owner. Thoughts come and go, but they are always owned, appropriated, and disowned. Here James cautions against a possible misunderstanding. He reminds us that, for something to be appropriated, it requires an appropriator. But James claims that thought itself is the owner, and, as such, appropriates and disowns not itself but to itself. He writes, "Thought is never an object in its own hands"; rather, it "appropriates to itself, it is the actual focus of accretion, the hook from which the chain of past selves dangles, planted firmly in the Present, which alone passes for real, thus keeping the chain from being a purely ideal thing" (*Principles* 323). James might have been clearer on this point, but he confesses in a footnote that, at the time that the text was written, he had not "dogmatically decided" of this issue (*Principles* 323–324 ft 18). The problem of thought acting as the owner, the appropriator, the judge etc., raises a possible homonculus problem.

The possible homonculus problem in James's analogy is that in order to explain longitudinal identity, i.e., identity–through–time, James uses the cow herder, or the passing, judging thought or current thinker as a mechanism to explain how we identify ourselves as the same person over time. I will explain the homonculus problem in detail, arguing that it poses no problem for James, but, in effect, confirms his theory about knowing ourselves as the same person or as a changed person over time.

John Searle says of the homonculus problem that "the idea always is to treat the brain as if there were some agent inside it using it to compute with" (*The Rediscovery of the Mind* 212). At first glance it seems as though James could be charged with this fallacy because he relegates the cow herder to the job of branding, which cashes out as the thinker branding thoughts as *his* , creating a conscious life and an identity for himself. There are at least two problems for James surrounding the issue of consciousness and identity. First, James needs to achieve continuity in our seemingly discontinuous consciousness. With consciousness construed atomistically, the unpalatable implication for James is that the self also loses its unity. It will be important, then, for James to construe consciousness as unified such that the self can also be portrayed as a unified whole. But part of this unity is derived from a secure identity, and so James next needs to induce personal identity into the conscious stream by way of the cow herder analogy. But the personal identity problem at this juncture splits; we need to account for transverse and longitudinal identity under James's theory. I have already shown that James is able to cope with the transverse identity issue, (identity–at–a–time) by his assumption that continuity is a primitive in consciousness. The primitive concept means that we are able to identify with our self at any particular moment in time, because, since our thoughts are continuous, we are able to maintain a familiar sense about whence we came, and whither we are going.

As for the longitudinal identity problem, if James cannot use the herder example as a mechanism for achieving continuity in our personal lives over long periods of time, he will then need a different explanation.[7] In order to clear up the homonculus issue, there are a few interconnected issues that also need to be addressed. First, I will explain the homonculus problem, and say why it may apply to James. Next, I will argue that James's cow herder analogy does not invite the homonculus fallacy. Finally, I will show how this allows James's theory to describe longitudinal identity, in terms of the cow herder analogy, without falling into a dangerous or erroneous philosophical fallacy.

In James's theory of mind, thought is described as the knowing function. It is responsible for the unity of our conscious activity. But when we ask what is responsible for the functioning of thought?, and answer that there is something within thought, or more primitive than thought that is really responsible for the process of thinking, then we have induced a homonculus into our cognitive processes to account for mental activity. Searle claims that most homunculi problems are found in the computational theories of the mind, where we need to ask "Who" is doing the seeing, reading or describing in any kind of causal explanation from a physical source to a mental or cognitive output (*The Rediscovery of the Mind* 212). So the issue here is whether or not James's cow herder needs a herder within a herder in order to properly brand his cows; i.e., whether thought requires anything more in order to be carrying out cognitive functions? Searle cautions that what most theorists use to escape the homonculus charge is "progressively stupider homunculi," and "the idea, in short, is that recursive decomposition will eliminate the homunculi" (*The Rediscovery of the Mind* 213). I think that James's theory addresses this concern when he speaks about the mysterious "who" that is supposed to be doing the appropriating. James realized that, in saying the thinker is the appropriator, he was in danger of being misunderstood. He attempted to clear up any confusion by claiming that Thought is the appropriator, not appropriating itself, but only appropriating *to* itself (*Principles* 323). Thought, then, for James is "the vehicle of choice as well as of cognition, and among the choices it makes are these appropriations, or repudiations of its 'own'" (*Principles* 323). This answers our question about the intelligence of the herder. It looks as though the herder or "thought" is very smart. James, however, makes no regression from the primitive passing judging thought, to some other central cognizing agent, because thought functions as the cognizer, the choice–maker. James, then, does not fall victim to the homonculus charge simply because of the primitive role he assigns to Thought. I do think, however, that we could still ask James for an explanation of what is making thought take place. But James attempts to answer this question in his response as a psychologist. James says, "And the reality of such pulses of thought [which is part of the more general

---

7I thank Wes Cooper for bringing the homonculus problem to my attention, for helping make clear the difference between the transverse and longitudinal identity problems, and for guiding me in an attempt to help solve this problem for James.

term 'Thought' that I have been using thus far], with their function of knowing, it will be remembered that we did not seek to deduce or explain, but simply assumed them as the ultimate kind of fact that the psychologist must admit to exist" (*Principles* 321). Again, James uses the passing thought to function as the knower, the deliberator, as the most primitive characteristic of our conscious make–up that requires no regression in order to carry out its cognitive tasks. I think that the homonculus fallacy becomes a non–issue for James more clearly in his discussion about identity. The question that I now need to answer for James is how he manages to induce personal, longitudinal identity into the stream of consciousness.

James argues against the empiricists that there must be a "proprietor," or some sort of owner to which all of our ideas cling. He argues that "there must be a real proprietor in the case of the selves, or else their actual accretion into a 'personal consciousness' would never have taken place" (*Principles* 320). For a person to maintain his identity, there has to be some unity among his thoughts and among his self of today and the selves of his past. James claims that this essential unity that is lacking in the associationists' writing is present in his notion of a medium in consciousness, the passing, judging thought. He claims that this medium is 'superior', and acts as the "identifying section of the stream" (*Principles* 320). But within this medium, then, how is it that present thoughts clinging to those of the past add up to a firm identity over time? To answer this question, James relies on the idea of inheritance. James remarks that, if we avoid the idea of an arch ego or substantial soul, but still insist that there is a real unity among our thoughts, and thus among our present and past selves, then we ought to consider the idea of the passing thought inheriting title from the last, and so on down the line. In consciousness, then, there is a continuum of thoughts, each giving over its title to the last, seamlessly, creating a never–ending series of transmission of thought. James puts it this way: "It would then, if its birth coincided exactly with the death of another owner, find the past self already its own as soon as it found it at all, and the past self would thus never be wild, but always owned by a title that never lapsed" (*Principles* 320). Our thoughts have a certain life–span, some thoughts having longer lives than others, but, nonetheless, it is a fact for James that all of our thoughts are "born owners" and "die owners." He means by this that every single thought comes into consciousness on the wings of another, and every thought on its way out is immediately giving rise to the next. Our identity through time seems secured by the simple fact that our thoughts in consciousness are continuously forming a never–ending stream, which, in effect, binds solid the past and present selves into one whole and continuous identity. For "who owns the last self owns the self before the last, for what possesses the possessor possesses the possessed" (*Principles* 322). James's idea about relations among ideas cementing our longitudinal identity is a powerful one, especially when it is considered in concert with his radical empiricism. To hint briefly at the connection I will say that in James's doctrine of radical empiricism, the relations among

thoughts are grounded substantially in consciousness and in brain functions, elevating the metaphysical connections between the relations themselves to a very real, empirically verifiable status. But I will offer more on this in Part Two. Briefly summing up my conclusions about a possible homonculus problem, I have argued that James does not describe mental activity in terms that require a homonculus, or a thinker within a thinker.Instead, James claims that the role of the passing, judging thought is the most primitive element of consciousness. Because James arguably offers a sound interpretation of the role of thought, he is thus also able to sustain his theory of longitudinal personal identity, or identity through time, by way of his theory of the relations between thoughts in consciousness, and its subsequent unity or stream–like quality. But in order to understand why James's view of long–term identity makes more sense, we need to look at the heart of the dispute between James and the empiricists, or as James calls them, the associationists.

In James's explanation of the defects in Hume's view of identity, he provides the further missing piece of the unity of consciousness puzzle. For Hume, the unity of our thoughts is a psychological connection made by resemblance, custom and habit. And this is why, for Hume, our past thoughts about a self cannot really be connected with present thoughts as though they were the same thoughts. James demystifies this Humean problem by arguing that the unity among our distinct thoughts is just as real as their distinctness.

> The unity of the parts of the stream is just as 'real' a connection as their diversity is a real separation; both connection and separation are ways in which the past thoughts appear to the present Thought;–unlike each other in respect of date and certain qualities–this is the separation; alike in other qualities, and continuous in time–this is the connection. In demanding a more 'real' connection than this obvious and verifiable likeness and continuity, Hume seeks the 'world behind the looking–glass' and gives a striking example of that Absolutism which is the great disease of philosophic thought (*Principles* 334).

The consciousness of the self was explained by Hume and his followers as atomic bits of thought, i.e., separate and distinct ideas. But, for James, this is nonsense–real things are thought of, not simply ideas, and moreover, there needs to be some unity in the stream of thought that serves as the medium for personal identity. So James argues rightly, I think, that by demoting unity in conscious thought to a mere psychological status, Hume is missing an essential connection and insight about the nature of consciousness. James reconciles this problem by promoting the concept of unity to an elevated role, marking elements that connect our thoughts of things as "genuinely real." This enables the procession of thoughts to reach back into our histories and beyond the specious present into our future hopes and speculations to provide a stable and yet continuously developing sense of who we are. But if our thoughts are construed as Hume's disjointed "bits", it is then impossible to get to James's picture of a unified, long term identity.

On the issue of the nature of thought, James remarks that the associationists have a "lurking bad consciousness about the Self" in their assertion that it is nothing more than a bundle of perceptions, and that the associationists quickly retreat from their description of the self when it comes time to address the problem of who it is that is doing the associating, remembering, willing etc (*Principles* 336). James mentions that none of them "openly tackle the problem of how it (the self) becomes aware of itself" (*Principles* 336). For James, these writers, instead, in talking "about the mind and about what we do... smuggling in surreptitiously what they ought avowedly to have postulated in the form of a present judging Thought, they either trade upon the reader's lack of discernment or are undiscerning themselves" (*Principles* 336). James's concept of the passing, judging thought, that serves a deliberating function as well as a knowing function, is the missing character in the associationist's story. The unity fought for has, in effect, been present all along, but its purpose misunderstood. Instead of painting the passing thoughts as single and unconnected, Hume ought to have recognized that past and present thoughts are continuous, much like waves on the sea. This simile represents the mechanism James provides to explain the continuity in thought, which, in turn, provides the foundations for personal identity. The related issue of transverse versus longitudinal identity, discussed by Wes Cooper in his essay titled "William James's Theory of the Self," I now introduce to further explore James's important concept of the 'passing judging thought', a discussion that will be brought to fruition in Part Two.

If Hume really was looking for the world behind the looking glass, an immutable self that underlies all thinking in a world of impressions in flux, then he seems to have set himself up for this disappointment. Hume's criterion for thought is too narrow to allow for a Jamesian self that is "thought" unified through continuity and time in conscious mental life. All that Hume's criterion allows for is numerous fleeting impressions, summed up as a bundle of impressions in constant flux. Since, for James, this is an unsatisfactory view of the self, he went about solving this problem of transverse identity (identity–at–a–time) by explaining consciousness as *my* consciousness, as that which is part of me at all times. (Cooper, "James' Theory of The Self"). James does this without having to postulate a person standing behind the realm of conscious thought, by appealing to thought itself as that which possesses a reflective ability that is aware of itself as a 'self'. But much earlier on in *Principles,* in James's chapter on "The Stream of Thought," this personification of ideas is objected to "by a certain French writer" as a "great philosophic blunder" (*Principles* 221). James replies that it would only be a blunder if by personality he meant anything more than the stream of thought itself. James adds that "if that procession be itself the very 'original' of the notion of personality, to personify it cannot possibly be wrong. It is already personified" (*Principles* 221). As Cooper suggests, James solves the problem of personal identity–at–a–time by proposing "that there is

no need to show how the various mental elements of the stream of consciousness 'come together' at a given time to become my consciousness, because they natively, primitively belong to my consciousness" (Cooper, "James' Theory of The Self" 510). According to James, my consciousness, then, as a unifying mechanism for my personal identity, is mis–described by Hume in his associationism. Hume's description is wrong because he does not credit the passing, judging thought as a primitive that unifies our conscious mental life, but, instead, turns to a theory about resemblance and continuity, leaving out the judging thought altogether. For James, the passing thought in the stream of consciousness functions as a primitive, i.e., a thought that cannot be reduced any further. And, again, the conception of thought as a primitive has the advantage of offering depth to James's interpretation of identity, since thought understood in terms of a primitive and a flowing stream has the ability to look back into the past by way of memory, and ahead towards the future, via imagination and speculation. The self in this context assumes a richer texture than Hume's, making use of our precious abilities to remember and imagine.

James acts as a mediator between the rationalist and associationist schools by arguing that our biological constitution is such that a persisting self through time does exist personified in thought, while our biological self is not immutable, but in a constant state of flux. So, against Descartes, James claims that we do not experience our self as immutable over time, and, against Hume, James claims that continuity in consciousness is real, manifesting itself in the ever changing self, and biologically rooted in the passing, judging thought.[8] The idea of the judging thought in James's theory assumes that the mind has an active role in carving out its history. By comparison, Hume's view of the mind appears passive and leaves the self in a stunted form.

In Hume's empiricism, the role of the mind is passive, as opposed to active or self– determined. Hume uses an analogy of the mind as a theatre, and its characters as thoughts, impressions or ideas, to describe this mind/thought relationship. He argues that thoughts are fleeting, and make their appearances and either quickly or gradually pass away from consciousness. For James, the mind assumes a more active role than what is assigned by Hume. James claims that we come to believe in things and know about things because the mind attends, wills and desires. In short, the mind is capable of focusing its attention on particular stimuli, while blocking out others, and thus plays an active role in determining what is thought about, what is desired or felt and so on. James makes use of this concept in his essay "The Will to Believe," where he suggests that we have the right to adopt a believing attitude in religious matters, arguing that we can choose to think a

8My understanding of this issue is due to James's *Principles of Psychology*. I also learned about part of the connection about James's naturalism through Owen Flanagan's book *The Science of the Mind*, in chapter 2, 'Naturalizing the Mind: The Philosophical Psychology of William James', pp. 30-42.

certain way, or believe in certain notions, because the mind is equipped to do so. On the same note, James confesses that at times we know not how or why we believe, conceding that he is not certain about the origins of all thoughts, or why we think the way we do. He means only to confirm that the mind plays a role in actively willing some of our thoughts and actions, which, for James, is evidence enough to prove that we are responsible for carving out our lives.

This belief in free will manifested in an active, willing mind, James extends to morality. James's firm conviction is that our will is responsible for us either having or not having moral beliefs, and he assumes that we are free to think and act morally if we actively pursue this path. In James's essay "The Dilemma of Determinism," he argues that acting morally is a choice that we make if we see the world as indeterminate. Otherwise, arguing that the world is predetermined, that determinism is the most accurate world view, in its denial "that anything else can be in its stead," for James "virtually defines the universe as a place in which what ought to be is impossible" (*Faith and Morals* 161–162). Without room for "what ought to be," there seems to be little sense in worrying about what we should or should not do. The moral realm is wiped out in one efficient stroke. James, instead, urges that we include the notion of 'chance' in our metaphysics, which means "only the negative fact that no part of the world can claim to control absolutely the destinies of the whole" (*Faith and Morals* 162). The notion of chance opens the door to pluralism for James, the idea that there are many different possibilities that a person may entertain, that there is more than one pre–established path for the universe as a whole. James remarks that thinking otherwise, seeing the world as determined instead of pluralistic and open to chance, resigns a life of oughts, deliberating, and choosing, to a marginal existence. This kind of life for James rings dull and portrays human beings as automatons. James admits that he is most interested in pragmatically illustrating the difference it would make to see the world as determined or not. He says, "what interest, zest or excitement can there be in achieving the right way unless we are enabled to feel that the wrong way is also a possible and a natural way–nay, more, a menacing and an immanent way" (*Faith and Morals* 159). James suggests that a life understood as devoid of alternate possibilities, or chance, is not only dull but implies that, since there is only one path, we need not feel regret. James claims that he "cannot understand regret without the admission of real genuine possibilities in the world" (*Faith and Morals* 175). The insight here is that there have to be right and wrong ways of action, or else there is little use for feeling guilty about choosing one course of action over another. And to this point James remarks, "what sense can there be in condemning ourselves for taking the wrong way unless we need have done nothing of the sort, unless the right way was open to us as well" (*Faith and Morals* 175). The upshot of James's conception of the world as one of possibilities and chances is that it clears the way for a genuine belief in spirituality, and the probability of a spiritual self. The active mind taking

part in choosing to believe in religious ideas makes possible a genuine or real spiritual part of the self, released from passive, deterministic bondage. Since James claims that we have a hand in our self–making, the possibility of becoming a spiritual or moral person is thereby secured. But, because of Hume's role of the mind, this possibility is severed, and the self remains a passive, bundle of loose ideas, mysteriously connected in our psychologies. I leave my discussion of James and Hume so that I can pursue James's theory of the self in more detail. I will narrow my focus, and concentrate on the consciousness of self, exploring the active, spiritual self as it manifests itself in thought.

Part Two

The Constituents of Consciousness and Metaphysics of Self

James's psychology of self takes a metaphysical turn in his *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, a collection of essays published posthumously in 1912.[9] James's Metaphysical leanings are witnessed in his thoughts on consciousness in essays such as "Does Consciousness Exist" and "A Pluralistic Universe". Here James describes consciousness as a rich and stream-like connectedness, and interprets the relations and transitions among all of our experiences as continuous and ever–changing. I think it is important to draw attention to James's repeated emphasis on the concept of a dynamic connectedness among our experiences, because it is here that James's concepts of self and identity find strength. In Part Two, then, I will flesh out some connections between James's psychologically interpreted self, and his metaphysical conception of self. I will argue that James's stream–of–consciousness concept in *Principles*, recast in terms of pure experience in *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, remains philosophically coherent when coupled with his *esse est sentiri* doctrine. I think that James is able to salvage his *esse est sentiri* doctrine while cleaving to his interpretation of consciousness as continuous. To my mind, James can argue that consciousness is continuous while arguing that it must be "felt," whereas James's well respected intellectual biographer Gerald Myers argues the opposite. Myers, I think, makes the issue more confusing than it really is, and thus offers the skewed conclusion that James ought to give up the whole notion of continuity in consciousness. I appeal to the understanding of John Searle for some support on this issue, and I think that Searle offers some important insight into the nature of consciousness, overlooked by Myers, that supports my interpretation of James.

James's conception of consciousness and thought processes is what I will first explore in order to get a sense of one of the most intimate aspects of self. For James, consciousness is always a continuous series of mental relations, and, since James's concepts of radical empiricism and pure experience touch upon this important concept, it will be useful to explore these areas of James's thought so that a more complete picture of his philosophy may take shape. I also want to use these concepts to illustrate how James manages to break down ontological and epistemological dualisms left over from Cartesian philosophy. What emerges is James's unique worldview where the physical and the psychical worlds of experience blend at the apex of consciousness. But how is this important for my project as a whole?

The discussion of consciousness of self is important because it explains

---

9James's essays from *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, "Does Consciousness Exist," and "A World of Pure Experience," were published in academic journals as early as 1904.

how James accounts for a continuous stream of conscious thought, which, in turn, provides us with a convincing portrait of personal identity. The ensuing discussion is also needed to explain how James's picture of reality and our place within it, i.e., his metaphysics of self, coupled with his portrait of consciousness, acts as a wedge that leaves clear a passageway to the spiritual and occult areas of human experience. I will not make this final connection until Part Three, in which James's concepts of "the fringe" and "the more" in consciousness are coupled with his notion of the subliminal self, which provides an enigmatic channel to meaningful spiritual and religious experiences. James's psychological self, then, once philosophically interpreted, pushes us far beyond the scope of the Humean self into the often far-reaching and sublime realms of human experience. In places, however, the path James takes in exploring this new ground is fraught with difficulty, and steeped in controversy. I will now turn to James's portrait of the self by focussing on his theory of consciousness and thought, addressing questions about what they are, and how they function in the mind and body of a person.

James designates five features of thought as the essentials in Chapter Nine of *Principles*: thought is part of a personal consciousness; thought within a personal consciousness is always changing; thought is sensibly continuous; it always tends to objects independent of itself, i.e., it is cognitive, or possesses the function of knowing; and thought is selective, attending to some parts of experience while rejecting others (*Principles* 220). Thinking, then, is what we usually assume to take place within the conscious mind, the active and central seat of the empirical self. For most, says James, this activity will yield an exciting, yet evanescent inner life. This is an example of James's first concern, in which he argues that one's experience of thinking is experienced as my thought, and not merely as a thought. Thinking taking place within a personal consciousness, implies that every thought has an owner. The personal character of our conscious life is described by James in terms of particulars, meaning that individual thoughts exist within the minds of particular people. For James, our thoughts are owned by individuals, affording us privacy and a sense of our personal self. James maintains that "the only states of consciousness that we naturally deal with are found within personal consciousnesses, minds, selves, concrete particular I's and you's" (*Principles* 220). There are most likely no ideas or thoughts roaming outside of people's minds, he says, simply because we have no experience of them. His insistence that thoughts are in the mind renders our thoughts insulated from the thoughts of others. The thinking self, to James's mind, is personal and subjective, but it is, of course not only a private realm. The personal self is vulnerable to public scrutiny and is often engaged in social exchange. By 'personal,' James means that the self's thinking capacity is a private affair; it is private in the sense that the thinking goes on within a person's brain and mind.

Since thoughts are personal for James, we are then actively involved in

the thinking process. As William Gavin astutely points out, "James is here advocating the efficacy of consciousness" (*Reinstatement of the Vague* 20). We are thus active participants in a life laden with moral and social responsibilities, choosing what to think, and willing to believe. Given James's overall philosophical bent towards activity and productive work, it is no wonder he is advocating an active role for thought. Gavin has his own ideas about why James chooses this theory instead of the opposite, i.e., a view of the mind as a passive theater simply entertaining stimulus. Gavin argues, "the reason is simple: consciousness must have a role to play if life is to be intense. Consciousness must be personally involved if we are to get from life that sense of zest for which James was always looking" (*Reinstatement of the Vague* 20). For James, then, conscious experience is intense because we are shaping our world-view, acting as the creators or artists of our own reality. We are creators because we are selecting certain parts of experience to attend to, focusing on the immediately felt objects of our experience, while neglecting other aspects of conscious experience. This analysis most obviously brings to mind James's concept of subliminal consciousness, where much undigested experience lies in wait, either to be consciously attended to or to pass away from consciousness altogether unnoticed.

The active, personal consciousness of self, then, is for James manifested in the phrases 'I think' and 'I feel', instead of in representations of mere thinking and feeling. The 'I' in this experience is important because, as James mentions, the self or person is the seat of all conscious activity, so to leave the 'I' out would trivialize the concept of consciousness, if not misconstrue it altogether. For James, the conscious thought process, in its truest description, must be considered as a "part of personal selves" and not as something unowned, floating in the abyss (*Principles* 222). Thoughts within my mind, for example, will blend one into the next, making the thought process smooth and unimpeded. The notion of the 'personal' aspect of consciousness is important for James's overall philosophy of self in that our warmest and most intimate thoughts contribute to self-understanding, and hence help provide us with an identity. Personal thoughts, beliefs, etc., offer us a greater feeling of who we are. In Charles Taylor's book *Sources of the Self*, he echoes these sentiments of James's. Taylor further suggests that, without a set of personal thoughts and beliefs, we have only a shallow sense of who we are, or a weak identity. Thoughts, then, whether in the form of beliefs, desires, or contentions, for both James and Taylor, all function in the end as the general fabric out of which our most intimate feelings, such as religious sensibilities, become integrated into our personal selves.

The personal, actively selecting consciousness, James's first and fifth aspects of thought, sandwich the fourth aspect of thought, which deals with objects independent of itself. Gavin groups James's first, fourth and fifth parts of thought together because, in his view, they all contribute to James's insistence on life's intensity. For James, the cognitive function of our

thoughts is intention, and with intention comes conception. Gavin notes that conception is defined by James as "neither the mental state nor what the mental state signifies, but the relation between the two, namely the function of the mental state in signifying just that particular thing" (20). There are at least three insights that can be gleaned from Gavin's take on James's view of consciousness. First, Gavin claims that consciousness can be interpreted as bipolar, but that for James this characterization remains inadequate. James needs a richer conception, says Gavin, because he "is looking for a view of consciousness that will, at one and the same time, keep it as active and keep it as continuous, with the rest of experience" (21). The tidy division of subjective and objective, or knower and thing known, although being part of conscious awareness, is too limited to capture the richness of our experiences. Dualisms, while being part of James's metaphysics, fail to acknowledge the connections or transitions between experiences. Gavin thinks that dualisms also fail to capture James's full view of experience because thoughts are constitutive of objects, and, as such, are never impartial. We cannot be impartial viewers because "each and every awareness of experience is intentional, that is constitutive" (20). If this is so, Gavin contends that our awareness is intense because we are at every moment creating or shaping the objects of our experiences.

James also thinks that thought is continuously changing, that, in accordance with our temporal reference points, once a thought occurs, it is never to again recur as identical with the original in the past. James claims that, if he is right about this then he will have put to rest the opposing theories of Locke and the Herbartian school on the issue of the nature of consciousness as atomistic or discontinuous. This issue harkens back to one of the central issues of *Principles*, where James is attempting to debunk the atomist's claim that in the mysterious depths of consciousness there lies a fixed and certain order. What these schools of thought are attempting to do, according to Gavin, is reduce the rich complexity of consciousness to simplicity. James resists this line of thinking because it has disastrous effects on a sustainable, flexible identity. He is pushing for an identity that remains secure throughout the ordinary changes that one faces in life, without conceding that identity is something fixed within us simply because our thoughts are just reoccurring thoughts from past experiences. Because Hume argues that thoughts recur, he is bound to the conclusion that identity is fixed and hence unchanging in the face of new experiences. James replaces this concept with the notion that our thoughts, because of their constant renewal, continuously offer the self's identity a new texture. This does not mean that, because our thoughts are continuously forming anew my identity is constantly, completely renewing itself. It only means that my identity, my understanding of who I am and what I care about, is shaped by new experiences and is capable of undergoing change while I can simultaneously maintain a stable sense of my self. Thus, although a person's identity can maintain some degree of security through life changes, it is just as possible for

a person's identity to become vulnerable because of change. Our identity, then, may incur a few bumps and bruises, taking on different characteristics accordingly, but, for James, thought and identity continue changing while remaining an integral part of the conscious self. If we want to side with the atomists, we need to argue that thoughts recur, rooting identity in the immutable storehouse of ideas. And for Jamesian sympathizers, taking the atomist view would render impossible an interpretation of identity as a process, taking shape as a consequence of new experiences.

In James's broader pragmatic portrait, his sentiment that thought continuously changes mirrors his general picture of reality. In *Pragmatism*, James claims that the world in its totality ought to be construed as a series of relations that are continuously being reshaped by new experiences. This is why James argues that in a pragmatic theory of truth, we must continue testing our old truths in light of new experiences that seem true, or that seem to accord more harmoniously with the totality of our experiences to date. James not surprisingly quotes Heraclitus as saying that, with respect to thought and experience in general, we never descend twice into the same stream. To prove that our thoughts about a single object change over time, James remarks that, just as when we are in different states of mind, "what was bright and exciting becomes weary, flat and unprofitable. The bird's song is tedious, the breeze is mournful, the sky is sad" (*Principles* 226). James's summary about mutability in all of our thoughts is worth quoting at length.

> For there it is obvious and palpable that our state of mind is never precisely the same. Every thought we have of a given fact is, strictly speaking, unique, and only bears a resemblance of kind with our other thoughts of the same fact. When the identical fact recurs, we must think of it in a fresh manner, see it under a somewhat different angle, apprehend it in different relations from those in which it last appeared. And the thought by which we cognize it is the thought of it in those relations, a thought suffused with the consciousness of all that dim context. Often we are ourselves struck at the strange differences in our successive views of the same thing. We wonder how we ever could have opined as we did last month about a certain matter. We have outgrown the possibility of that state of mind, we know not how. From one year to another we see things in new lights. What was unreal has grown real, and what was exciting is insipid. The friends we used to care the world for are shrunken to shadows; the women, once so divine, the stars, the woods and the waters, how now so dull and common! the young girls that brought an aura of infinity, at present hardly distinguishable existences; the pictures so empty; and as for the books, what was there to find so mysteriously significant in Goethe, or in John Mill so full of weight? Instead of all this, more zestful than ever is the work, the work; and fuller and deeper the import of common duties and goods (*Principles* 227–228).

Our particular frame of mind or mood is then a crucial part of James's explanation for why we think that we experience the same idea over and over again. James suggests our perspective, or our specious perspective is to blame.

That we can never experience the same idea twice is also argued for in James's cognitive theory. In short, James contends that every brain state, every pulsing thought, is taking place in a succession through time, and thus

the brain material itself changes in harmony with these pulses of thought or feeling. He claims that, "whilst we think, our brain changes, and that like the aurora borealis, its whole internal equilibrium shifts with every pulse of change" (*Principles* 228). In order not to misrepresent James, it is worth mentioning that he thinks that a particular brain state may recur, but what is important is the distinction between *one* brain state recurring, and the whole complex activity in the brain recurring whilst a particular idea is thought. The enormously complex array of thought that accompanies any one particular thought is what does not likely recur. It is analogous to wave crests, James says, allaying possible confusion in this clarifying note:

> It need not of course follow, because a total brain-state does not recur, that no *point* of the brain can never be twice in the same condition. That would be as improbable a consequence as that in the sea a wave-crest should never come twice at the same point of space. What can hardly come twice is an identical *combination* of wave forms all with their crests and hollows reoccupying identical places. For such a total combination as this is the analogue of the brain-state to which our actual consciousness at any moment is due (*Principles* 229).

James's "cerebralism," or his theory that brain states interact with mental dispositions, is an important advancement beyond the Cartesian theory which supports the notion that mental states or spiritual substances are capable of being studied independent of the body. James's neurophysiology also surpasses Hume's theory, in which Hume claims ideas or mental states associate themselves according to ideational laws. Whether or not James's thoughts on the neurophysiology of the brain are accepted today, his claims remain important because they address the issue about the nature or structure of our thought patterns. James argues that if we take the proposition seriously, i.e., that no two ideas are ever exactly the same, then we have left behind the theories of Locke and those of the atomistic schools for good.

Denying that ideas are permanently fixed says James, directly opposes the atomists' views about consciousness. For James, the associationist concept of a permanent idea "making its appearance before the footlights of consciousness at periodic intervals is as mythological an entity as the Jack of Spades" (*Principles* 230). James faults our misuse of language for this mythological conception of thought as permanent and atomistic, or being made up of "parts". He says that it is no wonder that this view grasped the imaginations of men, since "they only spoke of their states as ideas of this or of that thing" (*Principles* 230). Language, according to James, encourages this faulty connection between naming single objects and singling out individual thoughts. Greek and Latin languages resist this atomistic mythology because their structure instead invites the notion of change and adaptability. The claim is that "names did not appear in them inalterable, but changed their shape to suit the context in which they lay" (*Principles* 230). This flexibility, says James, would have made it easier to "conceive of the same object as being thought of at different times in non-identical conscious states" (*Principles*

230). And perhaps if this way of thinking about ideas in a conscious thought process had penetrated the empiricist tradition prior to Hume's theorizing, it may have been less natural for Hume to think of thoughts as permanent, atomic bits pulsing in and out of consciousness.

For James, thinking is most properly characterized using the stream metaphor because it connotes and emphasizes unity and downplays the notion of disunity or gaps in thought. The atomists such as Locke and Hume, as we have seen, promote the notion of conscious thought as disjointed atomic bits or parts that are mysteriously held together because of our psychologies. This view is utterly unacceptable for James. He attempts a debunking by reducing the emphasis placed on the notion of separateness in the thinking process, and instead emphasizes the importance of the unity and seamless nature of our thinking process, paying special attention to the more general flow of all of our coalescing and coterminous experiences. The continuous nature of thought manifested as conscious, unified activity is ultimately described by James as "that which is without breach" (*Principles* 231). If James makes any concessions to the atomists on the issue of thought being unified and seamless, then they are made in his description of the time-gaps in conscious experiences. But, as I think James proves, the time-gaps, even though real, do not threaten his conception of thought as changing, continuous and seamless. He stresses, in his concept of radical empiricism, that the relations between things, such as time gaps, function as the unifying element ignored by the atomists.

Thinking is a personal and continuous process that has peculiar features that make it look otherwise. These characteristics of thought made the atomists construe it as fixed and discontinuous. The time-gap characteristic of thought is a misleading feature, as it suggests that there are breaks between thoughts in consciousness, which suggests, further, that thought could ultimately be broken down into simple "atomic" parts. For James, continuity, or "that without breach," best describes the true nature of thought. The discontinuity that we sometimes experience is summed up by James as time-gaps in which consciousness "goes out altogether to come into existence again, or they would be breaks in the quality, or content of the thought" (*Principles* 231) Noticeable gaps in consciousness manifest themselves in our most ordinary experiences, such as upon waking from a night's sleep. In our wakeful, conscious state there is most definitely a felt time-gap between the moment we fall asleep and the instant that we are once again awake. But should this be considered a breach in conscious activity such that thought is most accurately described as segregated instead of continuous? James answers "no", arguing that such breaks are simply interruptions in our memory because we were asleep. And the periods of consciousness before and after sleep feel as though they belong together, coalescing into a unified personal consciousness, "as another part of the same self" (*Principles* 231). Time-gaps are accompanied by another kind of interruption, which James

calls a break in quality.

These breaks are distinct from the time-gaps in that they occur frequently while we are awake. An explosion that jolts our attention away from our reading, or a brilliantly colored flower that distracts us from our conversation with a friend, typifies this break in the quality of our stream of thought. A sudden break away from one thought or feeling to another, for James, disturbs but does not break completely our seamless train of thought. Disturbances in our conscious thought process, then, whether they take the form of a temporal or qualitative break, are characteristic of human conscious activity, which is part of the continuous nature of thought. James places his stream of thought concept, not in a mere temporal sense of continuity, but instead in a sense of continuity that incorporates inward cohesion and wholeness. To this point James remarks that we achieve this sense of inward continuity about our conscious processes "because they are parts of a common whole," and therefore "the consciousness remains sensibly continuous and one" (*Principles* 232). James makes a crucial connection between his conception of a personal, continuous thought structure as an essential part of consciousness, and his larger concept of the self in his question about what constitutes consciousness as a "common whole". James claims that the answer lies in calling this 'common whole' 'I' or 'me.' The continuous stream of consciousness is, then, for James what we mean when we refer to ourselves with the pronouns 'I' or 'me'(*Principles* 232). Changing, continuous thought, then, on James's view, is a central part of what we call the self. It is no wonder, then, that James construes both thought and the self as unified, since thought or consciousness is considered the focal part of the self. Disunity in either would result in a fragmented conception of self which is furthest from James's intentions.

The discontinuity experienced as time-gaps or abrupt quality changes is so weak, and the relations among our experiences so strong, that it leaves the continuous and whole structure of the self intact. "This community of self is what the time-gap cannot break in twain," James contends, and this is why "the present thought, although not ignorant of the time-gap, can still regard itself as continuous with certain chosen portions of the past" (*Principles* 233). The conscious self is described as continuous even though disunity and discontinuity are part of a person's percetual apparati. This is James's "unity in diversity" concept that he elaborates on in *Principles*, and in *A Pluralistic Universe*. In *Principles* James says, "the transition between the thought of one object and the thought of another is no more a break in the thought than a joint in a bamboo is a break in the wood. It is a part of the consciousness as much as the joint is a part of the bamboo" (*Principles* 233–234). The discontinuity in thought is so trivial, or due to a lapse in memory, that it has no detrimental effect on the description of consciousness as a continuous flow of mental activity. Bixler calls James's theory of complex states of consciousness in *A Pluralistic Universe* his "many in one" concept. James's

more solitary psychic states of the *Principles*, by comparison, are less complex, but are just as unified in thought. To this explanation Bixler adds that "in either case the state itself is experienced in its wholeness" (167). Diversity and discontinuity within consciousness, then, is harmless in James's view as long as it is not the only kind of relation that is ascribed to thought processes. The relations between all of our thoughts is enough to provide sufficient weight to his claims about continuity within the stream. James sheds further light on these concepts in his discussion about the role of our passing, judging thoughts.

The possibility of describing the conscious, thinking aspect of the self as the I, as the spiritual self, is lost for Hume, but remains open to James. The possibility comes in the form of James's "passing, judging thought," in which a stream, "this thread of resemblance," takes shape in the conscious, unified self. In James's notion of a continuous stream of thought, a connective judging thought stretches back to thoughts and feelings of our past, and forward towards desires or hopes. James's portrait conjures up images of overlapping connective tissues, an image of the self that is more favorable if we are interested in a rich connection with our historical selves, with the events and feelings of our past years. The overlapping self of James's perspective can also continuously re-situate us in a spatio-temporal framework that is intimate and familiar, and can provide a stable self-identity in new physical surroundings, or conceptual challenges.[10]

James's unifier of the self, then, is this passing, judging thought. James's description keeps him in the phenomenal world, arguing that the thought attending to our specific interests is responsible for keeping our conscious life moving and in order. Hume's mistake is casting off the role of the thinker and his thoughts to the "meta" or non-phenomenal realm by designating psychological laws as an explanation of the unity in consciousness. At this point we need to be clear about how James can mesh the idea of a world comprised of distinct objects, with the idea that all of these objects are metaphysically construed as seamless in our thought processes. In other words, can the fragmented world become unified within the confines of James's view of consciousness, or does our perception of the world as fragmented leave the self in a similar, splintered state? We have already witnessed the traditional empiricists' answer to this question. Hume and his

---

10 James, on page 336 of *The Principles*, mentions that there is one associationist that he knows of who escapes the Humean confusion "perfectly". He says that D. G. Thompson describes consciousness as needing a judging thought in order to properly describe the self. James quotes Thompson as saying that "All states of consciousness imply and postulate a subject Ego, whose substance is unknown and unknowable, to which [why not say by which?] States of consciousness are referred to as attributes but which in the process of reference becomes objectified and becomes itself an attribute of a subject ego which lies still beyond, and which ever eludes cognition though ever postulated for cognition." About Thompson's description of the conscious self, James says "This is exactly our judging and remembering present thought, described in less simple terms." (*Principles* 336)

followers leave the self in a shambles, offering little consolation apart from the notion of psychological connections among ideas as a conception of what we can rightly call the self. James, instead, insists that there is a reconciling concept to bridge the so-called gap between the fragmented world of objects and our unified conscious experiences, which would in turn offer a unified portrait of the self. This bridging is made possible by James's metaphysical analysis of reality: radical empiricism and pure experience, two central principles of James's later thinking that explain the nature of our experiences and how it is that our experiences hang together, unified, in consciousness.

Essays in Radical Empiricism is James's posthumously published labor of over thirty years, and it bore the fruit of two essential tenets of his philosophy, namely radical empiricism and pure experience, which, together, provide James with a view of the world that is supposed to offer a mediating way between the equally undesirable positions of idealism and associationism. James admits that these schools of philosophy each have their merits, and yet contends that they are both insufficient because of their philosophical limitations and implications. The idealists, for James, are helpful in that they offer a concept of unity as an essential component of our worldview, but their concepts are limited because they do not account for particularity. The associationists, on the other hand, offer an account of particularity, but they can in no way defend a portrait of unity or continuity. James argues that these two schools of thought need to take the more useful elements from each in order to characterize the world as it really is. Otherwise, as these positions stand in their original formulations, "each philosophical interpretation violate[s] the actual way in which we have our experience" (*Works of William James, Radical Empiricism* xiii). James's principle of unity among all of our experiential relations has proven to be an important concept that runs through most of his thought. The concept of overlapping and tightly woven connections among our experiences, is most prominent in James's doctrine of radical empiricism.[11]

A concise definition of radical empiricism appears in the preface to James's book titled *The Meaning of Truth*. Here James extolls the virtues of pragmatism and offers his schematic definition of radical empiricism, where he claims that a favorable acceptance of pragmatism is needed for radical empiricism to prevail. Segregated into three parts, James's radical empiricism is first a postulate, second a statement of fact, and third a general conclusion.

The postulate is that the only things that shall be debatable among philosophers shall be

---

11In Ralph Barton Perry's biography of James, he argues that James offers two important metaphysical principles, i.e., pragmatism and radical empiricism. He says that "the notion of pure experience was his deepest insight, his most constructive idea, and his favorite solvent of the traditional philosophical difficulties. Pragmatism provided his method or technique, and pluralism the architecture of the finished product; but radical empiricism gave his his building material" (Perry 278).

things definable in terms drawn from experience. [Things of an unexperienceable nature may exist ad libitum, but they form no part of the material for philosophic debate.]
The statement of fact is that the relations between things, conjunctive as well as disjunctive, are just as much matters of direct particular experience, neither more so nor less so, than the things themselves.
The generalized conclusion is that therefore the parts of experience hold together from next to next by relations that are themselves parts of experience. The directly apprehended universe needs, in short, no extraneous trans-empirical connective support, but possesses in its own right a concatenated or continuous structure (*Meaning of Truth* xiii).

Radical empiricism, for James, remains within the empiricist tradition "because it is contented to regard its most assured conclusions concerning matters of fact as hypotheses liable to modification in the course of future experience..." (*Works of William James, Radical Empiricism* xxvi). But, although James is rightly described as a philosopher within the empiricist tradition, he makes a significant deviation from it. James admits that our experiences constitute our understanding of reality, but he strays from the traditional empirical course when he claims that the world is unfolding, and plural, constituted of many *thises* and *thats*, and not out of *any oneness or absolute*. And unlike the empiricists, James's novel worldview is radical "because it treats the doctrine of monism itself as an hypothesis, and unlike so much of the half-way empiricism that is current under the name of positivism or agnosticism or scientific naturalism, it does not dogmatically affirm monism as something with which all experience has got to square" (*Works of William James, Radical Empiricism* xiii). A monist theory that states that there is only one kind of thing, such as the Absolute made up of an infinite number of attributes, or such as a theory that there are many different things but they are all made from the same kind of thing, is what James is alluding to here. Materialism is an example of the latter, in which sensations are considered identical to brain processes. Not surprisingly, James rejects both types of monism. Instead, he can be said to endorse a neutral pluralism. James's pure experience concept describes the universe as a composition of many different kinds of things, all made from preconceptual arrangements of pure experience stuff.

What is striking about James's radical empiricism definition is its implicit insistence on the continuity among thought, or among the many relations among mental events. This theme that runs throughout James's writing is important as a buffer protecting him from the pitfalls of Humean atomism and also from the other inadequate schools of thought, namely rationalism and idealism. Without a clear boundary between physical and mental substance or non-substance, as the case may be, and arguing for a neutral stuff that includes everything that is, i.e., all physical objects and all mental or conscious mind and brain activity, what remains is a Jamesian pluralistic world that can no longer be segregated along traditional metaphysical lines. The world can no longer be characterized as a random series of atomic bits, known through experience, and linked together by our

psychologies; nor can it be accurately described as primarily constituted from general abstract principles, or strictly made up of the mental in cooperation with the divine. The conscious, thinking being that we call self, then, instead exists for James within a continuously developing universe of unending possibilities where the constricting dualisms of matter and spirit, evil and good, possibility and necessity vanish, and are replaced with a sensitivity to the possibility of overlapping and equally viable systems of ideas. This is an important implication of James's pragmatism and metaphysical theory, but it is also important to realize that James does not condone just any system of ideas or worldview as a viable option. I think that James simply remains flexible and curious about options from which people achieve meaning, use, insight or knowledge. As *Principles* clearly illustrates, James remains a biting critic when he finds an author's work out of step with what his and others' experiences have taught him.

James's stream metaphor in *Principles*, used to describe the continuous and active nature of consciousness that lies in opposition to a seemingly disjointed and fragmented world of objects and ideas, takes the shape of James's pure experience model in his metaphysical philosophy. This necessarily comes about for James because all of our so-called mental and physical experiences are cast in terms of pure experience. For James, this means that the boundary between what is physical and what is mental is blurred, and instead, James chooses to characterize all experiences as different arrangements of the same kind of "stuff," i.e., pure experience stuff. Perhaps one of the most ground-breaking implications of James's doctrine of pure experience is that, in arguing that experience is plural and yet primitively composed out of the same stuff, James offers a viable debunking of ontological and epistemological dualisms. Questions about what things are, and about what we can know, are thought about in a rich and various context, rather than in compliance with the traditional philosophical schools. If we take seriously James's concept of the plural but neutral nature of the mind and body, then we may no longer consider such dualisms viable options. What then are some of the implications for the self? The plural self is not a being made up of matter and spirit, a dual-souled mental and physical being. The self or person is instead a blend of matter and spirit (since it is the same kind of stuff), a plethora of selves, a unity of continuous, pure experiences. And, if James's world view is accurate, then he claims to have bridged the traditional philosophical gap between the concepts of spirit and matter by viewing the world as a plurality of continuously expanding possibilities, all unified by their respective relations, and by casting such a reality in the light of pure experience. But James's theory of the conscious self is not always consistent nor well-received. The troubled and yet compelling *esse est sentiri doctrine*, i.e., his theory of consciousness stating that whatever is must be felt or experienced, is so controversial in Gerald Myers's view, that he claims James may have to give it up, along with his view that consciousness is continuous. I don't think that James need go to such extremes, even if he

himself at times had doubts about parts of his theories.

The crux of the problem with James's *esse est sentiri* doctrine is this: If we understand that what James means by *esse est sentiri*, to be is to be felt, is that mental states appear to be a unified, subjective stream of conscious activity, and, thus, are the way they actually exist as our subject states, i.e., if the appearance/reality distinction does not work for consciousness as it does for the physical world, then it becomes important to rectify this claim with his claims about continuity and introspection and their respective roles in consciousness. Myers suggests that James had difficulty maintaining his theory that the nature of consciousness is continuous and also doubted whether James's faith in introspection could prove revelatory in the enigmatic workings of the mind. Since James is skeptical about introspection's informative powers, Myers suggests that it is strange that James relied so heavily on introspection as the very tool for making claims about the nature of consciousness. This issue appears confusing because James's thoughts on introspection are spread out over the course of his life's writing, and it appears as though he modified his position on consciousness, or on what we can be aware of, in his later years. But the introspection and *esse est sentiri* issues become more complicated by Gerald Myers' interpretation, which suggests that James abandons his *esse est sentiri* doctrine, and moreover, that James ought to give up his claim that consciousness is continuous, and concede to the conclusion (Myers's) that continuity is apparent in the monitoring consciousness, but not on the level of conscious states. I think James can be rescued from the perils of Myers's conclusions. I will begin by fleshing out the arguments about continuity and introspection and respond by showing that Myers's interpretation at one point is confused, and thus his conclusions are misrepresentative of James's intentions. I want also to introduce John Searle's thoughts on consciousness, because he clearly illustrates why the issue of consciousness, coupled with a misconstrued portrait of introspection, causes so much avoidable confusion.

Myers claims that James, in 1895, formally surrendered his *esse est sentiri* doctrine, conceding that mental states can be separated into discrete mental elements (62). James vigorously opposed this position in *Principles*, where he argues against the atomists and the mind dust theorists, who speculate that bits of mind-stuff join, forming "distinctly sensible feelings" (*Principles* 153). But because of two seemingly contrasting examples in James's work, Myers argues that James changed his mind about what we are aware of in our own subjective life, and therefore he ought to surrender his former theory that states consciousness is continuous. According to Myers, James's "lemonade" example of his early period is in sharp opposition to his later lemonade claims. But, in my view, James need not have abandoned the *esse est sentiri* doctrine, even though his views in his earlier writing seem to vary greatly from those of his later years. In a footnote from *Principles* James writes:

I find in my students an almost invincible tendency to think that we can immediately perceive that feelings do combine. "What!" they say, "is not the taste of lemonade composed of that of lemon plus that of sugar?" This is taking the combining of objects for that of feelings. The physical lemonade contains both the lemon and the sugar, but its taste does not contain their tastes; for if there are any two things which are certainly not present in the taste of lemonade, those are the lemon–sour on the one hand and the sugar–sweet on the other. These tastes are absent utterly (*Principles* 153).

James is trying to tell us that feelings can't combine, unlike the colors of green and red combining to make brown. But Myers notes that James changed his mind when he in 1895 writes,

In a glass of lemonade we can taste both the lemon and sugar at once. In a major chord our ear can single out the c, e, g, and c', if it has once become acquainted with these notes apart. And so on through the whole field of our experience, whether conceptual or sensible (62).

In an end note Myers cautions that it may seem as though he is merely fabricating a distinct change in James's view, but defends himself by arguing that the change is clearly made in James's essay, "The Knowing of Things Together," where he remarks: "The sour and sweet in lemonade are extremely unlike the sour and sweet of lemon juice and sugar, singly taken, *yet like enough for us to 'recognize' these 'objects' in the compound taste* " Myers concludes from these seemingly opposing remarks that James's "new idea is that the state of consciousness that is the taste of lemonade is a complex compound whose elements include smaller units of consciousness such as the taste of sweet and the taste of sour" (503). Myers is making one possible inference from these two examples, i.e., that contrary to what James thought in his earlier writings, consciousness is indeed made up of parts. But it seems to be truer to James's thought to conclude not that the atomists and mind dust theorists were right all along, i.e., that consciousness really is made up of discrete, combinable bits–but, instead, that, since on closer scrutiny James found that it is possible to distinguish the taste of sweet from sour, that we are better discriminators than he once thought. If Myers is right, and James gave up the part of his esse est sentiri doctrine that suggests that we can not become aware of the phenomenological elements of one's whole mental state, what James ought to have claimed instead is that we are capable of distinguishing elements from the whole of our subjective life without concluding that consciousness is made up of parts. This way James's *esse est sentiri* doctrine remains mostly intact: consciousness remains as it appears, as it feels, continuous like a stream, but since some of our discriminating faculties are honed, we are able to discriminate among the various subjective states, articulating their differences and similarities without discarding continuity at the cost of atomicity.

Myers claims that James is obliged to let go of his notion of consciousness as continuous, because the continuity only applies to one level

of consciousness, i.e., to "the objects of consciousness rather than to the bare monitoring consciousness itself" (78). Myers is referring to the relations and transitions that James offers as proof that our subjective states are continuous and not discontinuous. Myers's claim is that all of these relations, transitions, etc., have no cohesive effect for conscious events. It is only at another level, at the level of the monitoring consciousness, that these relations have any cohesive strength. Myers' argument runs something like this:

P1: James conceded that consciousness consists of contents and the monitoring consciousness.
P2: He also claims that the relations among objects of consciousness account for the continuous nature of consciousness.
P3: "But if the objects are now conceded to be discontinuous, then of what use are James's directions for locating relations and transitions?"(78).
C: Therefore, "these relations no longer bestow an essential continuity on the contents of consciousness, for any continuity is attributed instead to consciousness itself, considered as something apart from content" (78).

So, as Myers claims, "James's concession plainly shows that the continuity has been removed from the introspected state to the introspective observing of it, the watching consciousness, (which he sometimes called *thought*)" (77). I have trouble conceding, with Myers, that James divides consciousness into objects and a monitoring consciousness. I admit that James talks about both of these aspects of consciousness, but he clearly states that consciousness has "no such inner duplicity." Myers is well aware of this, and yet concludes that James's continuity principle needs to be discarded on the fallacious grounds of consciousness' dualistic nature. When James speaks about the relations among conscious objects as evidence of its continuous nature, the discontinuity spoken about is not a contradictory claim. It is, instead, a feature of consciousness, just as is continuity, that in no way harms the overarching continuous structure of consciousness. Just because it is possible to distinguish among the various subjective states, this does not imply that the subjective stream is therefore discontinuous.

Myers's claim about relations having no work to do in consciousness proper is seriously misleading if not altogether false. The relations among our ideas, subjective states, etc., do work on the so-called "contents level," because, firstly, as I have already mentioned, the diversity among such objects of consciousness are simply called distinct for explanatory purposes, but, more importantly, the relations and transitions among subjective states are doing work on both levels, simply because there are not two levels, but different aspects of the same thing: the contents and consciousness proper of our subjective stream get recast in terms of pure experience, which means that everything is understood as the same kind of pure experience stuff, but made out of any number of different arrangements of this stuff. Myers is perfectly aware of these pure experience ramifications, and yet he insists on casting consciousness in a two-level hierarchy, and attempts to deliver a devastating blow to James's continuity principle. For these reasons, I do not think that

Myers's criticisms on this score amount to more than a confusing illustration of this aspect of James's portrait of consciousness.

This doesn't end the *esse est sentiri* debate. The problem of introspection as a tool for analyzing our own subjective states is, along with the continuity problem, at the heart of Myers's discontent. Our subjective states according to James are unified, and not atomistic, as Hume claims. But, says Myers, in order for James to make any claims of this kind, he would have to think introspection a valid method for describing aspects of consciousness. Otherwise, how could James espouse any theories about the enigmatic workings of the mind. James may answer that in introspection we feel intimately acquainted with our thoughts and feelings, and thus we feel that the passing thoughts, etc. are better described as connected rather than disconnected. And because our introspective faculties are at times dull, James claims that we fail to notice these connections because we are often "sloppy introspectors" (*Principles* 77). So introspection is fallible, and it is also unable to help us distinguish clear borders between the physical and non-physical parts of the world. The crux of the matter is this: Myers claims that James premised most of his conclusions about the unity of consciousness and the *esse est sentiri* doctrine on the flimsy assumption that introspection is revealing about the nature of consciousness, and, thus, James's conclusions about consciousness manifesting itself as unified instead of segregated are unfounded. Myers is right in that James doubted that introspection, used as some sort of revealing, inward-looking procedure for finding clear distinctions between objects of consciousness and objects in the world, could once and for all rule on an ontological division between the physical and the mental. Myers is also right that James was skeptical about introspection's ability to reveal "parts" of our subjective states. But I think that Myers misrepresents James's claims about introspection when he wonders why James clung to the idea that it could provide us with insight about our subjective states–introspection is revealing, but not in the sense that Myers uses the term. As a consequence, he concludes wrongly that James must let go of his continuity proposal for consciousness.

Our consciousness, our subjective states, that function so crucially at the core of our being, are understood somewhat differently by John Searle. In *The Rediscovery of the Mind*, Searle claims that consciousness is a natural phenomenon that has evolved over time, that it is similar to our other biological features, such as the digestive tract. Searle is sympathetic to James's theory of consciousness in that he also argues that it is personal, belonging to individuals, and thus easily eludes psychological and philosophical study. But what I find most crucial about Searle's theory is his insistence that introspecting in a literal sense, for one, misses the point and, two, takes the metaphor of looking inward too literally, thus misconstruing introspections' purpose and limitations. On this point Searle claims, "But when we visualize the world with this inner eye, we can't see consciousness. Indeed it is the very

subjectivity of consciousness that makes it invisible in the crucial way... If we try to draw our own consciousness, we end up drawing whatever it is that we are conscious of" (96). By arguing against literally looking inwards, or introspecting to find out about ourselves, Searle comments on what I think Myers is doing by splitting James's conception of consciousness into the "introspected state" and the "introspecting observing of it" (*Myers* 77). My concern is that Myers represents James's notion of introspection as this inner observation, thereby wrongly splitting consciousness into contents and contents' monitor. Searle's critique is in my view a most fitting response to Myers's misinterpretation. I think that Searle manages to debunk this issue by simply stating "...where conscious subjectivity is concerned, there is no distinction between the observation, and the thing observed, between the perception and the object perceived" (97). Searle surmises that when we paint introspection as an inward looking activity, we are pushing the literal meaning of inward observation too far-we are borrowing from the model of vision that distinguishes between things perceived and the seeing of these things. And Searle claims that, for introspection, "there is simply no way to make this separation. Any introspection I have of my own conscious state is itself that conscious state" (97). Introspection then is better understood not as a special capacity, but simply as thinking about our feelings, thoughts, moods, etc. as a tool for self-understanding (143-144). For these reasons, Myers's conception of observation does not work for conscious subjectivity, and, thus, his notion of introspection slicing up consciousness into contents and monitors is doomed, along with his aforementioned conclusions drawn from these bankrupt suppositions.

Part Three

James's Door to Immortality

James's keen interest in the fringe of consciousness led him to claim that within consciousness there exists a richness and a breadth in our experiences that usually exists untapped by mundane, everyday conscious awareness. In *A World of Pure Experience* James writes, "our fields of experience have no more definite boundaries than have our fields of view. Both are fringed forever by a 'more' that continuously develops, and that continuously supersedes them as life proceeds" (James, *Works of William James, Essays in Radical Empiricism* 35). Life experiences, for James, are forever in the making, fringed by new insights, ambiguous ideas, vague feelings and semi–lucid wonderings. The fringe of these experiences unifies relations among our varieties of thoughts, concepts, feelings, and objects of experience. James suggests that the term 'fringe' also refers to the vague areas in subjective awareness, or the areas of consciousness outside of the focus of attention. James's interest in the vague runs throughout his psychology, metaphysics and religious investigations. In *Principles*, as a psychologist, James was developing his theory of consciousness, arguing that there is much more to consciousness than anyone is aware. These investigations led James to continue the discussion about metaphysical concepts of consciousness that could not be properly treated in *Principles*. In *Essays in Radical Empiricism* and *A Pluralistic Universe*, James continues to expound on the areas of experience that seem to defy or resist analysis and description. Seemingly ineffable concepts such as the consciousness of self, the continuity of relations among experiences, and others, receive abundant and powerful explanation in James's later writing. Perhaps the most vague and enigmatic concepts that James tackles are found in *Varieties*. Here James is mired in the deeply mysterious world of the human spirit, groping in the dark, seeking to get a clearer sense of religious and spiritual attitudes of extraordinary individuals because, he says, "phenomena are best understood when placed within their series, studied in their germ and in their over–ripe decay, and compared with their exaggerated and degenerated kindred" (*Varieties* 294). In all of the vague or fringe–like aspects of James's philosophy, the self is alive to the rich manifold of life's experience, and possesses the ability to continue its spiritual existence in the beyond. On James's view, in exploring the more remote realms of human experiences, via our thoughts, feelings, intuitions, and the tendencies of our subliminal consciousness, new spiritual heights can be reached by making contact with the "anima mundi" within.

The mystical consciousness is yet another part of the subliminal self that defies rigorous analysis. James tries to provide a clear interpretation of his mystical studies using his pragmatic method. On this point, Robert G. Myers says that James starts with the assumption of the meaningfulness of the question (151). For James, then, questions about mysticism and inquiries

into the mystical consciousness are assumed to be important because they make some practical difference in people's lives. This idea urges commentators such as R. Myers to suggest that James's "pragmatic maxim is not used to eliminate metaphysics," but, is, rather used "as a tool for clarification" in order to understand the meaning of often unclear metaphysics (151). One of the shortcomings of British Empiricism for James is its reluctance to consider the consequences of the vague experiences, such as are found within our own consciousness, and others that are reported by mystics. Again, the knowledge criteria of Hume and Locke are too narrow for the scope of James's project. Since James is trying to mediate between rationalism and empiricism, or, as R. Myers adds, between "religion and science," his pragmatism better suits his broader project of examining the consequences of religious testimony. This is where James's pragmatism opens its doors wide and tolerantly examines the evidence of a variety of religious and mystical experiences.

James's pragmatic study of the meaningfulness of religious experiences is also his interpretation of human nature. Part Three, then, is an endeavor to elaborate on James's conception of our spiritual nature and how it, via the subliminal consciousness, is affected by a wider consciousness or world–soul. James's conceptions of the vague and the fringe of consciousness, the subliminal self and extra marginal consciousness, when elaborated on, should illustrate his arguments for a passage to the divine or supernatural realm. His theories on healthy–mindedness, the divided self, the sick soul and the twice born will also help clarify James's position on our interaction with the divine. Most importantly, though, I hope to portray James as a man who envisioned our central conscious experiences as a mere fragment of the possible experiences that lie within us and beyond in the supernatural realm. James said that a man's "over–beliefs," or those speculations that require a leap of faith, are perhaps his most interesting beliefs. In the spirit of James, then, I offer his own spiritual "overbeliefs," which prove to be some of his most fascinating, and perhaps most inspiring thoughts on the vast possibilities of human spirituality.

James means to harmonize the physical brain processes with his spiritual concepts by fusing them at the apex of a multi–leveled consciousness; the brain and soul are to mingle and work together. The higher–level consciousness, for James, functions as a passage to the divine via the brain. And, after the death of the body, James claims that the spiritual self can persist and remain connected with the supernatural realm. James argues for this position by introducing his beliefs on immortality. James makes clear in *Human Immortality: Two Supposed Objections to the Doctrine* that "thought is a function of the brain," and continues by arguing that this fact in no way precludes the soul from continuing to exist once the physical self is dead. James is arguing for the possibility of our spiritual consciousness existing beyond the finite life–span of the physical being.

James's own testimony illustrates his position most clearly. After rejecting an argument favoring the mortality of the soul along with the brain, James contends: "But the sphere of being that supplied the consciousness would still be intact; and in that more real world with which, even whilst here, it was continuous, the consciousness might, in ways unknown to us, continue still (*Human Immortality* 18). The brain and the spirit are thus connected, but their different qualities limit the physical self to a finite existence, while the qualities of the subliminal consciousness provide for the possibility of partaking in the infinite of the world soul.

For James, the brain is at the very least "interacting" with consciousness. I hesitate to say that the functioning of extra marginal consciousness is dependent on the brain because in a letter to Bergson James says, " it may amuse you to see a formulation like your own that the brain is an organ of *filtration* for spiritual life" (Myers 354). This statement urges Gerald Myers to claim that James left unanswered important questions about the relationship between consciousness and the brain and, that "James knew it" (Myers 354). G. Myers asks, what happens to the physical nature of consciousness, if it is not in some way brain dependent? It seems to me that it is fair for G. Myers to conclude that in James's philosophy there is no substantial soul for consciousness to attach itself to, and that this may make problems for its survival in James's stream of pure experience. But in the end, consciousness is not interpreted as some sort of entity that needs to fit into pure experience. On James' s interpretation, it instead meshes easily with pure experience because thoughts are what interpret the world as pure experiences and, are what afterwards classify for purposes of distinguishing different kinds of things. G. Myers, therefore, should not conclude that, in *Principles* and elsewhere James never attempted to answer these questions, since it is clear that James did make such an attempt in *Human Immortality* .

I think that James can be saved from G. Myers's criticisms by reinterpreting his use of the term 'filtration' as perhaps not brain–dependent, but instead, as brain–interactive. James argues that we are equipped with a higher level of consciousness that is brain–interactive and that is capable of transcending mortality. On this interpretation, higher consciousness retains a physical connection by interacting with the brain, while also maintaining its existence after the death of the brain. So it is not necessary for consciousness to have a substantial soul to attach itself to when it may instead interact with the brain and then transcend it at its death. James's interpretation of the interaction between the brain and higher spiritual consciousness is further supported in his discussion of the use and misuse of the term 'function.'

In his preface to *Human Immortality*, James clearly suggests that the brain and the secondary consciousness do indeed interact and, moreover, leave consciousness free to transcend the body through death, taking part in the "soul of the world" (*Human Immortality* vi). James submits to the charge

of sounding pantheistic in his world-soul analogy, but argues that the "mother-sea" concept can be understood in as individualistic a form as one pleases; i.e., there might be "many minds behind the scenes as well as one," without detriment to his theory that "the brain is represented as a transmissive organ" (*Human Immortality* vii). James seems to have been familiar with G. Myers's contemporary quarrels about our spirit's dependence upon the brain. James writes that the scientific community of his day put the question this way:

> How can we believe in life hereafter when science has once for all attained to proving, beyond possibility of escape, that our inner life is a function of that gray matter of our cerebral convolutions? How can the function possibly persist after its organ has undergone decay? (Human Immortality 7)

James boldly answered the scientific community by responding: "even though our soul's life may be in literal strictness the function of a brain that perishes, yet it is not at all impossible, but on the contrary quite possible, that the life may still continue when the brain itself is dead" (*Human Immortality* 12). James argues that people too often ascribe a superficial interpretation to the phrase "functional dependence," taking this to mean productive function, such as in the case of "power is the function of the moving waterfall" (*Human Immortality* 13). James explains that "in these latter cases the several material objects have the function of inwardly creating or engendering their effects, and their function must be called *productive* function" (*Human Immortality* 13). And, accordingly, "so it must be with the brain" (*Human Immortality* 13). James says that from this understanding of function, people logically conclude that "when the organ perishes, since the production can no longer continue, the soul must surely die" (*Human Immortality* 13). But James insists that this is too parochial an understanding of the term 'function.'

Widening the definition, James introduces the permissive and transmissive functions of the brain. The permissive function is a releasing function. James explains that "the trigger of a crossbow has a releasing function: it removes the obstacle that holds the string, and lets the bow fly back to its natural shape" (*Human Immortality* 14). There is also the transmissive function of the brain that James explains in terms of glass materials. James writes, "The energy of light, no matter how produced, is by the glass sifted and limited in color, and by the lens or prism determined to a certain path or shape" (*Human Immortality* 14). To James's mind, the permissive and transmissive functions in the brain act either to release or transmit our spiritual consciousness or soul to the world beyond the veil. And, by the same analogy, such permissive and transmissive activities may allow the world soul or consciousness to affect individual consciousness, such that the brain is, in fact, affecting consciousness without inhibiting its existence after the brain's death. James makes it clear that such experiences

are not normal, but extraordinary, and attests to this view with his metaphor of the brain as a thin veil. "Only at particular times and places," writes James, "would it seem that... the veil of nature can grow thin and rupturable enough for such effects to occur. But in those places gleams, however finite and unsatisfying, of the absolute life of the universe, are from time to time vouchsafed. Glows of feeling, glimpses of insight, and streams of knowledge and perception float into our finite world" (*Human Immortality* 6). Here James emphasizes the real affects that the wider consciousness may have on someone, but tempers his enthusiasm with the disclaimer that such affects are sporadic for those who have such experiences, and nearly absent in the lives of most. James insists that there is much more to the self than we are normally aware of, and by following his contemporary Frederick Myers[12] on this issue, James confirms that there is indeed a connection between our physical being, individual consciousness, and the wider consciousness. James quotes his colleague at length:

> Each of us is in reality an abiding psychical entity far more extensive than he knows–an individuality which can never express itself completely through any corporeal manifestation. The Self manifests through the organism; but there is always some part of the Self unmanifested; and always it seems, some power of organic expression in abeyance or reserve (*Varieties* 386).

Spirit or soul, then, is undoubtedly part of the bodily self that James insists we maintain throughout all of our experiences. I think that this explanation at least partially allays the criticisms of G. Myers, and also serves to further distance James from a strictly materialistic reading of the connections between the brain and spirit. James is entitled to wear his theological hat in order to make his spiritual inquiries, but he does this with an eye towards psychology. And I will show further that James, in an attempt to avoid contradiction, makes every effort to merge his theological speculations with scientific psychology. But, as I think James would have maintained, the burden of the proof lies with those who think they see contradiction.

James merges the consciousness of the physical self with the spiritual world in his conception of the world soul existing within all of us. But James maintains throughout his writings that the traditional concept of soul is mostly bankrupt. In *Principles*, James concludes that the existence of the soul perpetuated since the time of Plato and Aristotle has been firmly disproven. The soul of the ancients, a soul that is fixed and unchanging, says James, is superfluous for his scientific purposes because it lacks explanatory power (*Principles* 326). James writes, "By the soul is always meant something behind the present Thought, another kind of substance, existing on a non-phenomenal plane" (*Principles* 327). He finds "the notion of some sort of an

---

[12]Frederick Myers, James's contemporary, is not to be confused with Gerald Myers, his present-day biographer.

"anima mundi" thinking in all of us to be a more promising hypothesis...than that of a lot of absolutely individual souls" (*Principles* 328). James's final conclusion as a psychologist on the issue of soul is "that it explains nothing and guarantees nothing" (*Principles* 331). G. Myers, in commenting on James's dissatisfaction with traditional concepts of soul, says that "in *Principles* one reason for James's dislike of traditional ideas of the soul was that souls, as individual substances, must be discrete entities with boundaries, (if only immaterial ones), that fundamentally separate them from each other and make them discontinuous" (322). For his "vividly spatial imagination, boundaries meant chasms, breaks, and interruptions, barriers to cognition as well as to ultimate interactions between human psyches" (Myers 322). In James's psychology, constructing boundaries is like assembling walls or dead ends, which act as obstacles in the smooth and uninterrupted flow of relations among our concepts or ideas in consciousness. Philosophically, the notion of independent souls within individuals disturbs James because again it supports a discontinuous and insulated framework, severing the possibilities of psychical communication. On this point, James adds, "as for insulation, it would be rash, in view of the phenomena of thought–transference, mesmeric influence and spirit–control, which are being alleged nowadays on better authority than ever before, to be too sure about that point either" (*Principles* 331). For James, the traditional soul–notions also created philosophical puzzles about how to reconcile his unified conception of consciousness with his testimony about the splitting of consciousness in some people's minds, in which "thoughts may split away from the others and form separate selves" (*Principles* 331). And, for James's religious concerns, this concept of soul may block the spiritual self from being influenced by supernatural influences. James could have changed his conception of the nature of soul, recasting the physical in terms of pure spirit, but did not, or at least did not change his conception completely. G. Myers argues that it appeared as though James would do so, given his mystical metaphysics and interest in psychical research (352). I also had anticipated that James would eventually settle for a traditional conception of a spiritual self (apart from the empirical sort) in order to accommodate the religious material of *Varieties*. But, in *Principles* and *Varieties*, James clearly suggests that the traditional concepts of a spiritual ego or substantial soul lodged somewhere in each person are vacuous. What exists in us instead is a world soul. This idea seems to eliminate a theoretical gap between the material and spiritual worlds. The world soul concept is not thought to be made up of any material or spiritual substance, but instead it seems most comfortably aligned with James's concept of pure experience. Pre–conceptual thoughts, feelings etc., that are not yet conceptualized, classified, or named are thus "pure" experiences. Our experiences, then, are neither made up of matter nor mental elements, but simply pure experience stuff. This is James's way out of the time–worn philosophical debate over the precise point at which matter becomes mind, and mind matter. James claims that it is not possible to accurately distinguish mental input from the physical, and thus argues that no discernible border

can be ascribed to our perception of thoughts and things, and that they are all better of described as different arrangements of the same kind of experience stuff. A soul that conforms to pure experience is altogether different from other theories of soul. One difference is that James's pure experience soul is exempt from the traditional theoretical snags and limitations. James's world soul, manifesting itself as a part of our wider consciousness and the "more," if understood as consistent with pure experience, then, can not be tagged as either matter or spirit, but only as pure experience stuff. Understood this way, James's spiritual self is immune to traditional rebuttals that argue for or against a substantial soul. And this pure experience spiritual self reaches further than previous soul concepts, in that it incorporates living experiences with the supernatural realm by using the former as a medium for the latter. James's view of the soul, instead, encourages a blend of matter and spirit, and an expansive image, which is a step in the right direction, away from the Cartesian soul pellet theory which binds the soul to an immutable form.

For James, religion's variety is what best deals with the "more" of reality, or those areas of consciousness of which we are barely cognizant. James's interests in human nature follow him throughout his religious investigations, because such religious experiences were, he thought, rich in insight into the more mysterious aspects of the mind, soul and religious or spiritual self. What these investigations revealed to James was that, for one, there are a variety of religious temperaments which ultimately color people's world views. The healthy-minded, for instance, view the world optimistically; when they look at life, they look with pure hearts, seeing the good and beautiful around them. James agrees with his contemporary Francis Newman, who suggests that these pure souls tend not to reflect on their own existence "and hence are not distressed by their own imperfections" (*Varieties* 78). They instead have their mind's eye focused outwardly, basking in the glory of life and God. These "child-like natures" are akin to what both Newman and James call "once-born," who are said to have "no element of morbid compunction or crisis," as do their opposites, the sick souls, or twice-born (*Varieties* 78). The eternally optimistic soul whose "temperament has a constitutional incapacity for prolonged suffering," James says, tends to become the foundation for a particular religion, "a religion in which good, even the good in this world's life, is regarded as the essential thing for a rational being to attend to" (*Varieties* 112). The good and happy aspects of life are the focus of the once-born, or healthy-minded, and, likewise, their salvation lies in their ability, or in some cases, their natural disposition to see things optimistically with a sense of hope and faith in human kind. James cuts this distinction across the boundaries of involuntary and voluntary or systematic optimism. He notes about the involuntary sort of optimism that "it is a way of feeling happy about things immediately," and "in its systematical variety, it is an abstract way of conceiving things as good" (*Varieties* 82). In effect, such systematic optimists ignore the possible aspects of evil from their "fields of vision". But, as I will point out shortly, assuming a

healthy-minded temperament does little or nothing for those naturally endowed with a morbid temperament. The presence of evil in things occupies too prominent a place in these individuals' perspectives for any halting effect to occur. Their souls are more needy, and therefore require comfort and saving influences from beyond.

A healthy-minded disposition can only serve to heal the less fortunate souls of some of their illnesses, which is why James thinks it foolish to tell a severely depressed person to take a stand and be cheerful and excited about life. James argues that all of their intuitions and feelings point them in the opposite direction, telling them that their world is dark and hostile. As to the effectiveness of assuming an optimistic disposition, James remarks, "our troubles lie indeed too deep for that cure" (*Varieties* 121). James does, however, counsel his friends to look towards the good in the darker times. In a letter to Thomas Ward (1868), James writes:

> Remember when old December's darkness is everywhere about you, that the world is really in every minutest point as full of life as in the most joyous morning you ever lived through; that the sun in whanging down, and the waves dancing, and the gulls skimming down at the mouth of the Amazon... I am sure that one can, by merely thinking of these matters of fact, limit the power of one's evil moods over one's way of looking at the Kosmos. [13] (Hardwick 51)

But telling a friend that there is still good in the world in times of suffering is quite distinct from offering healthy-mindedness as a cure. The evil and darker aspects of human affairs can in mild depressive cases be shed, or exorcised from one's soul. But not so for those who are more deeply affected. James disagrees with the mind-curists, arguing that the healthy-minded disposition cannot make the ill-tempered and severely depressed see the world as a gentler place. And, thus, for these burdened individuals, healthy-minded remedies remain ineffective. On this issue James concludes that "there is no doubt that healthy-mindedness is inadequate as a philosophical doctrine, because the evil facts which it refuses positively to account for are a genuine portion of reality; and they may after all be the best key to life's significance, and possibly the only openers of our eyes to the deepest levels of truth" (*Varieties* 137). The "mind-cure gospel" may be inadequate, but James remarks that it is no silly appeal to imagination to cure disease. The mind-

---

[13] When James speaks of his own ascent from a period of prolonged suffering that plagued him from approximately 1867-1873, he seems to have taken on a healthy-minded approach in order to help nurture a lighter temperament. James is said to have been reading a great deal of William Wordsworth and Charles Renouvier in this dark phase, and it is supposedly Renouvier's theory of free will that helped James firmly establish for his own mind that human beings indeed possess a free will. James's first step, then, was deciding that he was free to believe that he governed his own life. He managed to eventually will himself free of the final stages of a lengthy depression, he claims, in part by actively willing against it.

cure gospel for James is instead a dignified and important doctrine because it champions a pluralistic metaphysics, describing the world as "an aggregate or collection of higher and lower things and principles, rather than an absolutely unitary fact" (*Varieties* 112–113). Although the religion of healthy–mindedness is looked upon by the more morbid temperaments as ineffective, it remains a way of life for those who are naturally disposed towards the good and happier aspects of life. It also serves a normative purpose for those others who are less disposed towards optimism, goodness, and happiness; the healthy–minded temperament, for some, can be adopted and used to help break out of debilitating depressions. It can, in effect, offer hope and peace of mind. But James's final word sides with the sick souls: "let sanguine healthy–mindedness do its best with its strange power of living in the moment and ignoring and forgetting, still the evil background is really there to be thought of, and the skull will grin in at the banquet" (*Varieties* 121). In this conclusion, James reveals part of his own morbid temperament, confirming that he firmly believes that the darker sides of life are all too visible and prominent to be ignored; if any good is to be had from the darker moments in life, James says that such experiences can often be the most telling and profound. The healthy and sick souls view the world accordingly and, not surprisingly, base their religions on such views. A person's outlook thus effects her ontology, metaphysics, and requirements for spiritual redemption. The religion of healthy–mindedness may suffuse a person's whole character, and, in order to understand the possibility of salvation through conversions and transformations via the "active subliminal self" we need to explore James's remarks on the sick souls, twice–born, and divided selves.

James's psychical research probed the mysterious worlds of those who claimed to have extraordinary experiences that were unexplainable and impenetrable by ordinary twentieth–century scientific methods. The sick souls that James claims may eventually reach spiritual salvation possess varying degrees of morbidity. There are two extremes according to James: there are those who think that individual evil in the world is something that can be flushed out as a result of a simple maladjustment of oneself with the environment that can be cured; and there are more serious cases of individuals who find in themselves an essential evil nature that needs more than a superficial cure, i.e., extremely sick souls who look for healing in the supernatural realm. James distinguishes between the two extremes with the remark: "There are men who seem to have started in life with a bottle or two of champagne inscribed to their credit; whilst others seem to have been born close to the pain–threshold, which the slightest irritants fatally send them over" (*Varieties* 117). The deepest suffering, therefore, needs redemption by a second birth. James mentions that the redemption is not a reversion back to a former state of health, but instead a new conscious experience, one which alters one's conscious awareness, bringing light into the darkest aspects of mortal existence. The case studies of melancholy and depression, for James, can be categorized as "the vanity of mortal things; another the sense of sin;

and the remaining one describes the fear of the universe" (*Varieties* 117). James thinks that ultimately "it always is that man's original optimism gets leveled in the dust" (*Varieties* 117). And this sentiment strikes another blow to healthy–mindedness. For, if we are able to acquire an optimistic attitude, it is soon enough crushed under the weight of life's tragedies.

In *Varieties, James* anonymously recounts an autobiographical sketch of one of his bouts with panic–fear. James writes that one day, feeling out of sorts, and rummaging through his dressing room for an article, he was struck with a horrible fear of his own existence. He says that, coupled with this feeling of terror, he was simultaneously struck with the image of a pale and entirely helpless patient from the asylum. James continues:

> This image and my fear entered into a species of combination with each other. That shape I am, I felt, potentially. Nothing that I possess can defend me against that fate, if the hour for it should strike for me as it struck for him. There was such a horror of him, and such a perception of my own merely momentary discrepancy from him, that it was as if something hitherto solid within by breast gave way entirely, and I became a mass of quivering fear. After this the universe was changed for me altogether. I awoke morning after morning with a horrible dread at the pit of my stomach, and with a sense of the insecurity of life that I never knew before, and that I have never known since (*Varieties* 117).

James is not alone in his mortal dread. He recounts similar stories that were relayed by Tolstoy and Bunyan. The significance of these stories lies in their complementary reports of second births, or deliverance from these morbid states. And, in the annuls of the subliminal consciousness, the healing process begins as the morbid souls open their minds to spiritual influences, or saving graces from beyond.

But the tendency (whether its more natural or contrived) to dwell on the evil or darker aspects of life, suffuses the psychologies of people to such great extents that their selves can split or divide, which for many people causes severe emotional trauma. James cites many cases of people who claim to live with more than one self, willing often contradictory moral paths, creating for themselves moral anguish and, as a result, suicidal dispositions. The divided selves are akin to sick souls; they too see and feel the darker sides of life and often find themselves submitting to their disturbing impulses and desires. The division James speaks of comes about by way of transformation, or an alteration of interests within one's character. On this point James says,

> Our ordinary alterations of character, as we pass from one of our aims to another, are not commonly called transformations, because each of them is so rapidly succeeded by another in the reverse direction; but whenever one aim grows so stable as to expel definitively its previous rivals from the individual's life, we tend to speak of the phenomenon, and perhaps to wonder at it, as a 'transformation.'
> These alterations are the completest of the ways in which a self may be divided (*Varieties* 160).

James claims that what these people are experiencing is a shifting of ideas and of interests from peripheral to more central, and from more central back to peripheral parts of consciousness. These sudden emotional changes leave our subjective lives strongly altered. James says that "emotional occasions, especially violent ones, are extremely potent in precipitating mental rearrangements" (*Varieties* 163). And repairing a split self or sick soul is often, but not exclusively, secured through religious conversion or transformation experiences.

James, in attempting to pin down what happens in any experience of sudden transformation, suggests that subjective mental states are replaced by new ones. But it isn't as the atomists would have us believe; mere ideas are not being substituted, but instead whole mental episodes are being replaced, furnishing the mind with an entirely new outlook on life. James uses the expression 'field of consciousness' to represent "the total mental state" or "the entire wave of consciousness or field of objects present to the thought at any time" in his attempt to explain the psychology of conversion experiences within the subliminal self (*Varieties* 186–187). James adds that it is impossible to outline any boundary around this field, which complements his disdain for conceptual walls or dead-ends. And what is important to note here, says James, is the "indeterminacy of the margins" (*Varieties* 187). In "A Suggestion about Mysticism," written in February, 1910, close to the time of his death, James maintains that consciousness has no boundaries. James writes, "There is at any rate no definite bound set between what is central and what is marginal in consciousness, and the margin itself has no definite bound *a parte foris*" (*The Works of William James: Essays in Philosophy* 158–159). The width of a person's field of consciousness is then simply as wide or narrow as the person's conceptual scope. James mentions that, in cases of genius, a person's field is uncommonly vast, and, by contrast, in those who are suffering from an illness or fatigue, their fields can be frustratingly narrowed "to a point". What is also important about this concept, for James, is that the matter or content of the field of consciousness is what guides our behavior and determines our next series of attentions (*Varieties* 187). But "the most important consequence of having a strongly developed ultramarginal life of this sort," says James, "is that one's ordinary fields of consciousness are liable to incursions from it of which the subject does not guess the source" (*Varieties* 189). In the cases of automatic writing and speech, the source may be mysterious, but James argues that these experiences originate in the subliminal parts of the mind, and eventually find their way into central consciousness. Conversion experiences are both gradual and sudden, temporary and permanent, often leaving people feeling born anew. James stresses that in the end what is most important is not how such conversions come about, but instead, what they yield. The pragmatic fruits of experiences are again emphasized, since what is attained is more telling about the experience as a whole. "Spiritual vitality," "renewed energies" and "impossible things becoming possible" are only some of the fruits of

conversion. James argues that not to miss the point about what is yielded in transformations is to concede that there is a shift in character to higher spiritual levels. "Love," says James, is similar to conversion experiences in that "it reveals new flights of ideality while it lasts" (*Varieties* 205). And what both uplifting experiences do "is show a human being what the high-water mark of his spiritual capacity is" (*Varieties* 205).

The annals of the subconscious self are furnished with unusual pathological experiences and religious testimonies that are not necessarily conversions, but are, nonetheless, experiences in the subliminal region of the mind. And some subliminal selves are much more accommodating to spiritual influences than others who possess a less-developed subconscious awareness. James argues that "it is logically conceivable that if there be higher spiritual agencies that can directly touch us, the psychological condition of their doing so might be our possession of a subconscious region," and, because of this James concludes "the hubbub of waking life might close a door which in the dreamy Subliminal might remain ajar" (*Varieties* 195). The distracting activities of everyday life, then, may serve to interfere with saving influences from beyond. But, if these influences have any chance of penetrating the remote and more central regions of the mind, then James assures us that these higher powers "may get access to us only through the subliminal door" (*Varieties* 195). And once we are affected by saving influences from the more or the higher spiritual supernatural realm our attitudes towards life are usually affected for good.

Mystical consciousness is real and important for James in that, understood correctly, it can be revealing about the supernatural world, or at least the effects divine influences have on such extraordinary individuals. While affirming his belief that there is indeed a transcendent, wider consciousness that we can be affected by, in *A Pluralistic Universe*, James says, "I think that it may be asserted that there are religious experiences of a specific nature, not deducible by analogy or psychological reasoning from our other sorts of experience. I think that they point with reasonable probability to the continuity of our consciousness with a wider spiritual environment from which the ordinary prudential man... is shut off" (*Varieties* 135). James confesses that he lacks a lively communion with God, but, when he speaks with people who have had religious experiences first hand, he shares with them a deep spiritual empathy. Upon hearing religious testimonies, James often declared that "there is something in me which makes response when I hear utterances from that quarter made by others. I recognize the deeper voice. Something tells me: 'thither lies truth" (Morris 64). James, in his discussion of mysticism, is championing non-scientific theory in the face of his own scientific credentials and his twentieth-century scientific community. James does this because he takes seriously any experience that yields fruits for people's lives and, fascinated by the various personal testimonies of mystical experiences, he accordingly seeks to understand their plausibility and

significance for people's lives. In ascribing a noetic or knowing quality to mystical experiences, James is, in effect, granting them pragmatic and epistemic significance in the sense that mystical experiences are for the mystic, spiritually enlightening and truth-bearing. James urges us to respect the mystical consciousness because "we know so little of the noetic value of abnormal mental states of any kind that... we had better keep an open mind and collect facts sympathetically for a long time," since "we shall not understand these alterations of consciousness either in this generation or in the next" (*The Works of William James, Essays in Philosophy* 165).

James boldly contends that mystical states are "states of knowledge" (*The Works of William James, Essays in Philosophy* 293). He also suggests that states of mystical intuition may be only very sudden and great extensions of the 'ordinary field of consciousness'. James speaks of the ordinary and the transmarginal fields of consciousness as eventually combining, making the ordinary margin or what used to be the fringe of consciousness, "grow more central." The empiricist notion that the unit of consciousness is the "idea" is again challenged by James's conception of the transmarginal consciousness. James argues, instead, that this marginal region of consciousness is made of flowing, unified, psychic states, made up of past feelings, thoughts, etc., memories that have lodged themselves in the subliminal self, registering at the subconscious level of awareness. The subconscious material is just like those of ordinary consciousness in their unity, but they differ in their "extent," in that the "margin surrounding the field of consciousness may vary greatly from one moment to another. At certain times the margin is extended, and a vast amount of material, usually transmarginal, is included" (Bixler 167). The meshing of the transmarginal and ordinary states of consciousness occurs when there is an "immense spreading of the margin of the (ordinary) field" (*The Works of William James, Essays in Philosophy* 157). The margins of ordinary psychic states overlap with the increasingly dominant subliminal realm, until these subconscious memories, etc., are assimilated into the more conscious, and focal, awareness. But not all people's spiritual fields of consciousness are alike. James argues that "some persons have naturally a very wide, others a very narrow field of consciousness" (*The Works of William James, Essays in Philosophy* 158). The natural width of our consciousness will in effect determine the probing range of our subliminal self. Hence, when we assess the mystical consciousness of individuals, James argues that we need to pass a "spiritual judgment," "and not content ourselves with superficial medical talk, but inquire into the fruits for life" (*Varieties* 317). In any mystical experience, the effects illuminate a new religious or life attitude similar to James's conversion experiences. The difference between the mystical and conversion experiences is that the former brings about a spiritual revelation, and the latter graces a person with a renewed sense of vigor and health.

According to James's research, mystics are affected by a "cosmic

consciousness" not unlike the wider or world consciousness that effects the subliminal consciousness of religious converts. The mystical experience and subsequent world view differs from religious conversions or transformations in that they are ineffable, they possess a noetic quality, they are transient or short-lived, and they often occur without the participants' initiative (*Varieties* 317). James claims that what is most important about mystical experiences is that they bring us to "revelations of new depths of truth," just as conversion experiences are capable of providing novel and superior spiritual benchmarks (*Varieties* 313). Moreover, mystical states provide rejuvenating experiences of many sorts, ranging from the more mild experiences of *déjà vu*, or feelings of complete peace with the natural environment, to a feeling of being at one with God, or reaching the ultimate state of nirvana. The self undergoes a transformation, or as Robert Nozick puts it, an enlightenment experience that is in some way revelatory (*Examined Life* 244). James and Nozick both agree that those who undergo transformation experiences are probing a deeper reality. But in James it appears as though the deeper reality is somehow independent of the experience itself, since he claims that there always exists more than we can ever grasp at one time. In researching eastern religions, Nozick illuminates the opposite possibility; in such cases there is no guarantee that there is any deeper reality apart from what exists at the moment of the experience (*Examined Life* 244). Nozick explains that because of the ephemeral nature of these experiences, i.e., because they are usually "unrepeatable or exactly replicable" they are highly subjective experiences that do not easily ascribe to objective verifiability tests. Nozick takes it one step further adding "whether or not the enlightenment experience is an experience of the very deepest reality, ... it feels like it reveals one extremely deep" (*Examined Life* 246). Nozick and James both require a leap of faith when deciding whether or not such experiences reveal a deeper reality for the mystic. In any case, they both agree that we ought to keep an open mind to the mystic's claims since they may be experiencing something truly deeper than what most of us experience in routine existence. Nozick leaves off with a cautionary note urging us to think carefully about extraordinary experiences, and to "recall the two kinds of errors statisticians describe–rejecting something when it is true or accepting it when it is false" (*Examined Life* 252). I think that James's thinking on this point is complementary. James also cautions us against ruling things *a priori* out of court, arguing that we ought to first test these extraordinary testimonies against a wide range of human experiences before passing judgment.

James believed that we belong more intimately in this mystical or supernatural realm because he considered it the source of our most ideal impulses. But, as he points out on a number of occasions, this spiritual realm is not merely ideal, since it produces real, verifiable effects in people's lives. James qualifies his criteria for believing in mystical testimony, and for acknowledging that mystics have divine knowledge in his assertion that

"mystics have no right to claim that we ought to accept the deliverance of their peculiar experiences, if we are ourselves outsiders and feel no private call thereto" (*Varieties* 325). The most we can do, then, is grant them knowledge and authority over their own mystical feelings, since these experiences by their very nature defy conventional scientific verification. And because there are so many false cases of mystical revelation, charlatans, cheats and lunatics, James insists that, if we are not ourselves mystics, then the empirical verification method must be used to test the value of these extraordinary experiences. The mystic, to James's mind, is "invulnerable" and ought to be left "in undisturbed enjoyment of his creed"(*Varieties* 324). This is the faith state for James and, quoting Tolstoy, he claims that "the faith–state and mystic states are practically convertible terms" (*Varieties* 324). Having Faith says James, is an essential part of all of our beliefs, whether they are scientific or religious; the amount of faith necessary is a matter of degree and not kind.

In the larger picture, James aligns the range of character traits of the mystic consciousness with pantheism and optimism. The mystical belief and testimony that God is everything, or that everything is God accounts for the pantheistic interpretation. Mystics are considered primarily optimistic rather than pessimistic because they usually recount experiences that lead them away from their previous stages of darkness or ignorance. James concludes that mysticism is "anti-naturalistic, and harmonizes best with twice-borness, and so-called other-worldly states of mind" (*Varieties* 323). James took another subtle jab at scientism, in reaffirming his claim that there are sources of knowledge yielding fruits in people's lives of which his scientific colleagues were ignorant. Science was missing out, not because of innocent naïveté, but because of a blatant dogmatic mentality. James persisted in his philosophic vision, hoping to put together a more serious metaphysical doctrine, but because of illness, and finally death, his final project was never completed.

Non–completion, however, suits the spirit of James's philosophical investigations, since he suggests that in all areas of inquiry there is always more work to be done. In his richly descriptive and compellingly interpretive philosophy, James urges us to discover philosophical truths for ourselves. He points out the "thises" and the "thats" of life's experiences, and expects us to draw from our own personal experiences for deeper understanding. Theory, for James, is never sufficient in its own right as a tool for living well, or for discovering truths. Practice in the form of activity, coupled with descriptive and interpretive theory, suggests James, is needed in order to know how to live not only well, but with intensity and vigor. Even though James never managed to complete his final metaphysical theory, he left us inspirational texts that urge the reader to formulate a personal conception of self, among other philosophical concepts, by guiding us back to our own experiences so that we can "uncover" truths and meaning in our lives. Equipped with the

aid of life–informed theory, we are ready to move into action or practice and struggle with our own philosophical puzzles, just as James struggled to exorcise his own philosophical ghosts through the process and fruits of writing.

Works Cited

Bixler, Julius Seelye. (1926) Religion in The Philosophy of William James. AMS Press. New York, New York.

Cooper, W. E. (1992) *William James's Theory of The Self* , The Monist, An International Journal of Philosophical Inquiry. October, Vol. 75, No. 4.

Cooper, W. E. (1994) *James's Theory of Mental Causation* , Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society, A Quarterly Journal in American Philosophy. Spring, Vol. XXX, No. 2.

Flanagan, Owen. (1984) The Science of the Mind. second edition. The MIT Press. Cambridge Massachusetts.

Gavin, W.J. (1992) William James and the Reinstatement of the Vague. Temple Universtity Press. Philadelphia, USA.

Hume, David. (1978) A Treatise on Human Nature. second edition, edited by P.H. Nidditch. Clarendon Press. Oxford, England.

Hume, David. (1978) An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding. Hackett Publishing Company. Indiana, Indianapolis.

James, William. (1898) Human Immortality. The Riverside Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

James, William. (1981) Pragmatism. Hackett Publishing Company. Indianapolis, Indiana.

James, William. (1899) Talks to Teachers on Psychology: And to Life's Ideals. Henry Holt and Co. New York, New York.

James, William. (1909) The Meaning of Truth, A Sequel to Pragmatism. Longmans, Green and Co. New York, New York.

James, William. (1981) The Principles of Psychology. Harvard University Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

James, William. (1980) The Selected Letters of William James. Edited with an introduction by Elizabeth Hardwick. Published by Doubleday. New York, New York.

James, William. (1985) The Varieties of Religious Experience. Penguin Books Canada Ltd. Ontario, Canada.

James, William. (1977) The Works of William James, A Pluralistic Universe. Edited by Frederick Burkhardt, Harvard University Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

James, William. (1978) The Works of William James, Essays in Philosophy. Edited by Frederick Burkhardt, Harvard University Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

James, William. (1976) The Works of William James, Essays in Radical Empiricism. Edited by Frederick Burkhardt, Harvard University Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

James, William. (1985) The Works of William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience. Edited by Frederick Burkhardt, Harvard University Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

James, William. (1962) William James, Essays on Faith and Morals. Selected by Ralph Barton Perry. The World Publishing Company. Cleveland, Ohio.

James, William. (1992) William James, Pragmatism in Focus. Edited by Doris Olin. Routledge. London, England.

Levinson, Henry S. (1981) The Religious Investigations of William James. The University of North Carolina Press. Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Lloyd, Genevieve. (1993) Being in Time, Selves and Narrators in Philosophy and Literature. Routledge. London, England.

Morris, Lloyd. (1950) William James, The Message of a Modern Mind. Charles Scribner's Sons. New York, USA.

Myers, Gerald E. (1986) William James, His Life and Thought. Yale University Press. New Haven, USA.

Myers, R. G. (1992) Willaim James, Pragmatism in Focus. Edited by Doris Olin. Routledge. London, England.

Nozick, Robert. (1989) Examined Life, Philosophical Meditations. Simon and Schuster Inc. New York, New York.

Nozick, Robert. (1981) Philosophical Explanations. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Penelhum, Terrence. (1975) Hume. The Macmillan Press Ltd. London, England.

Perry, Ralph B. (1935) The Thought and Character of William James, Briefer Version. Harper Torchbooks. New York, USA.

Searle, J.R. (1992) The Rediscovery of the Mind. The MIT Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Stendhal, (Marie-Henri Beyle). (1959) The Red and the Black. Bantam Books, New York, New York.

Stroud, Barry. (1977) Hume. Routledge and Kegan Paul. London, England.

Taylor, Eugene. (1983) Exceptional Mental States. Charles Scribner's Sons. New York, New York.

Tennant, F.R. (1968) Philosophical Theology. Cambridge at the University Press. Cambridge, England.